

# The Symbol of the Linen Belt

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us resume our public worship of God. We shall sing to his praise from Psalm 40, and we're going to sing verses 9 through to 13. Psalm 40, from verse 9.

Within the congregation great, I righteousness did preach. Lo, thou dost know, O Lord, that I refrained not my speech. I never did within my heart conceal thy righteousness. I thy salvation have declared, and shown thy faithfulness. Thy kindness which most loving is, concealed have not I, nor from the congregation great, have hid thy verity. Thy tender mercies, Lord, from me, O, do thou not restrain. Thy lovingkindness and thy truth let them me still maintain. For wills past reckoning encompass me, and mine iniquities such hold upon me taken have, I cannot lift mine eyes. The more than hairs are on mine head, thence is my heart dismayed. Be pleased, Lord, to rescue me. Lord, hasten to mine aid.

Lord, hasten to mine. I sing these verses, Psalm 40, verse 9 to 13, within the congregation great, I righteousness did preach.

Within the congregation great, I righteousness today. Oh, that I Because, O Lord, that I  
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[ 4 : 43 ] The End The End The End The End The End The End Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray.

O Lord our God, as we come before you in this act of worship, we give thanks that we are able to seek your help in order that we might worship you in spirit and in truth.

As we are encouraged to do.

We can do nothing. It is not enough for us to be persuaded of the truth that your people are equipped with all the graces that are necessary to life.

[ 7 : 45 ] We are learning all who are in Christ that they will bear that fruit which is to your glory. And that is what they believe with all their heart.

I am the vine, he says, and you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. For without me you can do nothing.

We pray that you will remember all your people as they journey unto that. For they are in the world while they are not of the world.

And as such, they will endure much temptation, trial and testing as they sojourn on their way.

[ 10 : 22 ] When we look at the example of the children of Israel as they were in the wilderness. They experienced drought. They experienced the weariness of the way.

They experienced hunger. They experienced hunger. They experienced many trials that exposed even their own sin.

For that was your purpose for allowing them forty years in the wilderness. That they might discover more of themselves.

And so it is with regard to your people. While often times they wonder why they are left in this world for so long. With the new providence that is what you have ordained.

But that not one moment of that endurance will be wasted. Not only do they discover more of themselves.

[ 11 : 29 ] They discover more of your grace. So we bless you and thank you for every way that is realized and experienced. We commit and commend them to you today.

Each one. Be they in the immaturity of youth. Or be they in the maturity of old age.

As your servant the psalmist describes your people when they are preparing to enter into eternity. In old age when others fade they still forth fruit will bring.

And that is what is true of them as long as you have undertaken to sustain them in this life.

And we give thanks for the fact that all the days of their life they are committed to you. And you endow them with that commitment, that spirit of commitment to ensure that they will persevere therein to the end.

[ 12 : 42 ] So remember this world in which we live. Remember all aspects of our life here in the world. We pray for those who are unwell. We would bring them before you and ask for their recovery.

Whatever ailment assailed them be it physical or mental or spiritual. We pray that you would be with them through it.

Remember those confined to their homes because of it. Perhaps placed in hospital. Others who are in the weakness of old age confined to homes for the elderly.

For all who depend on the care of others may they know that to be their portion under your hand. We pray for the grieving, for the sorrowful, for those who are concerned for others.

We ask that you would sustain them by the word of your power. We remember in your presence this situation in which we have met even in this time of pandemic.

[ 13 : 58 ] While we see our fortunes improving we pray that that may go on apace. And that this may be true of the world.

And that through these things that we might see the hand of God extended to us in mercy. When we reflect upon all that we discovered in this last year and more.

Lord, we marvel at your patience and at your forbearance towards us. For those who are low of heart to believe.

We pray forgiveness for every one of us and ask for mercy. Bless the congregations of your church. Wherever the Lord is cast throughout the world we pray that you will bless them.

As their own presbytery and those who are part of it. Continue to bless your word. We do not know who are under it.

[ 15 : 04 ] But we know that they are not under it for any reason. But that you have appointed that that word would be instrumental in bringing them to yourself.

Or if not that, for driving them away from you. May the former be true. May they bow the knee to Christ each one of us.

And may we learn what it is to be submissive to his will for us. Whatever that may be. Bless your word now. As we read it.

Continue to remember all the various parts of your church throughout the world. Keep your people safe. Add to their number.

Cleanse from sin and pardon us in Jesus name. Amen. We are going to hear the word of God as we have it in the Old Testament scriptures.

[ 16 : 02 ] We are reading in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. And chapter 13. We will read from the beginning of the chapter down to verse 14.

Jeremiah chapter 13 verse 1. Thus saith the Lord unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water.

So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord, and put it on my loins. And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock.

So I went and hid it by Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. And it came to pass after many days that the Lord said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there.

Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it. And behold, the girdle was marred. It was profitable for nothing.

[ 17 : 35 ] Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.

This evil people which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle which is good for nothing.

For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I cause to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah.

For as the Lord said unto me, saith the Lord, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.

But they would not hear. Therefore thou shalt speak unto them this word. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine, and they shall say unto thee, Do we not?

[ 18 : 46 ] Certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine. Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with drunkenness.

And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together. Saith the Lord, saith the Lord, I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them.

Amen. And the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise.

I would like us now to turn for a short while to consider this portion of the scripture that we have read. And particularly what some of your Bibles may identify as a parable, the parable of the girdle, the first 11 verses of chapter 13 of this prophecy of Isaiah.

Many describe the prophet Jeremiah as the prophet of the new covenant. In chapter 31 and verse 31, we have the words, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

[ 20 : 31 ] Words that create optimism in the heart of a people who know all about the displeasure of the Lord. In chapter 17, we have the words, the son of Judah is written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond.

It is graven on the table of their heart upon the horns of your altars. That is the dilemma we are repeatedly confronted with throughout the prophecy.

The faithfulness of the God of the covenant responded to with the coldness and the apathy, even out and out disobedience of his people.

But as is pointed out by Alexander Stuart, it is a striking, though perhaps not a surprising fact, that of all the prophets, it is Jeremiah, the man whose mission was so largely associated with judgment, who was led into the clearest conception of the grace of God in the salvation of men.

Jeremiah is a prophet who preaches the word of God.

[ 22 : 16 ] He declares, like many other prophets, thus saith the Lord. And just like all the other prophets, he proclaims the truth of God, as well as record it in written form.

However, on this occasion, his way of conveying the truth is by way of symbolic act. If you are familiar with the Old Testament, you will know that this too was a common mode of communication.

For example, Hosea was required to marry a wife of Hurdom, an adulterous wife, to convey the unfaithfulness of Israel.

Hosea was required to marry a wife of Hurdom, an adulterous wife, to convey the unfaithfulness of Israel. Hosea was required to lie on his side for a time to show that Israel were going to suffer for its sins. The prophet Ahijah, when he met Jeroboam, he tore his cloak into twelve pieces to show how God was going to divide the kingdom.

These symbolic acts were painful to the prophets, not just because of the discomfort they were made to suffer, but mainly because of the truth that they conveyed.

[ 23 : 39 ] The Old Testament scholar, Willen van Gemeren, makes this point about Ezekiel. The symbolic acts must not have had a dramatic effect on his fellow exiles.

Even if they refused to listen to his words, they could not but wonder why Ezekiel was willing to suffer personally for the word of God.

The oracles of Yahweh's warfare against Judah made a deep impression on the prophet. No one could accuse Ezekiel of rejoicing in the faith of Judah and Jerusalem, because the prophet identified with the adversity of his people.

He too experienced God's abandonment of Judah and Jerusalem. Which is why we hear the description of Jeremiah as the weeping prophet, trying to make sense of the senseless.

A nation charged with forsaking the fountain of living waters, while at the same time hewing out cisterns. Broken cisterns that can hold no water.

[ 24 : 59 ] Broken cisterns that can hold no water. It breaks the prophet's heart to report such evil. What then is the symbol that the prophet is required to use?

The prophet is required to buy or purchase a linen girdle and put it on.

Now this item of apparel has been described in many different ways. A waistband, a sash, a belt, or a loincloth, or in more recent time linen shorts.

It seems to be worn next to the skin. A waistband, a waistband, or in more recent days. A waistband, a waistband, or in more recent days. And the prophet was required to wear it for an indefinite period of time.

He is then told when to remove it and go and put it into a hole in the rock. And we are told where he is to take it.

[ 26 : 06 ] He went to the Euphrates and digged and took the girdle from the place where he was to hide it.

Or to the place where he was to hide it. Of course, commentators want to be accurate in fulfilling their remit in interpreting the scripture.

And some of the translations have a different location to the one recorded in the authorised version. Because of the difficulty there is in the distance that the prophet was expected to travel to fulfil God's command.

Some people choose to think that what the prophet was doing was purely symbolic in its entirety.

He was simply in his mind being translated to this place in the form of a vision or in the form of some other way of God's doing.

[ 27 : 20 ] It doesn't necessarily follow and it's not really important where he was to place this garment. All that is true really is that the garment had to be placed in a place where it was to remain for an indefinite period.

And then at the appointing of God he was to go and take that garment from where it had been placed.

And the important thing is that the garment that girdle says was marred. It was profitable for nothing.

I don't think they're meant to be interpreted every part of this telling of what took place. You're not meant to spiritualise or allegorise.

It's not meant to be considered like that. The important thing is that this item of clothing which wasn't to be washed before, during or after the prophet was to put it on.

[ 28 : 35 ] And it was to be placed where it was to rot, basically. It was marred. It was profitable for nothing.

And the meaning of what was done is reasonably easy to understand.

But it is confirmed by what follows. God has a relationship of intimacy with his people. Read again verse 11.

For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord.

That they might be to me a people for a name, for a praise and for a glory, but they would not hear. Now the thing is, the garment is compared to the Lord.

[ 29 : 46 ] Some have seen in the description of the linen garment, a reference to the linen garments of the priesthood, which in turn symbolised the nature of Israel's calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

However, the garment was marred. It was no longer, as we saw, foot for purpose, profitable for nothing. And the exact nature of the problem is explained in verse 10.

This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after their gods to serve them, to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing.

The symbols are easily understood if they remain confined to the context. Professor John L. Mackay suggests that the symbolic action is an allegory of the exile, namely the removal from the covenant community of the pride that had fatally distorted their relationship with the Lord.

As the belt is removed, so it speaks of the removal of the chosen from the land of promise, to experience bondage.

[ 31 : 12 ] What God is doing is not dealing in this way with the people, but with the pride of the people, which resulted in them following the path that brought it about.

They refuse, he says, to hear my words. And this is where they have gone wrong. They refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them and to worship them.

That is their sin, and that is the sin that is prompted or promoted by their pride.

What God is doing is not simply dealing with a people, but with the sin of the people, specifically. As the writer Chris Morgan writes, As Christians choose humility, they choose the path of grace and blessing.

But when people act in pride, they choose the root of divine wrath and resistance. If people choose a certain path, and believe it or not, we do make choices that affect our relationship with God.

[ 32 : 44 ] Disobedience is a costly exercise. Sin takes you further than you want to go.

It keeps you longer than you want to stay. And it costs you more than you want to pay. Judah's pride was their sin, and God saw to it that it was to be dealt with.

Perhaps this is the preeminent sin of our generation. Conduct that is arrogant and claims spiritual independence, while in reality what is there is bondage to all manner of spiritual evil.

Anything but submission to God. And that finally is what is despised by God's covenant nation, when they do not listen to him.

God had caused Israel and Judah to cleave to him, that they might be unto me for our people, and for our name, and for our glory.

[ 34 : 00 ] This is what they were given in the covenant. Words reminiscent of the language of the Pentateuch. His people were high above all nations, which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour, and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God.

Some people might think that we exaggerate whenever we describe what the people of God mean to God.

In truth, I do not think that we have ever really grasped the full reality of that. As far as the words of our text are concerned, John Calvin wrote the following, He united himself to the seed of Abraham, that he might also bind them to himself.

The election of God was therefore like a bond of mutual union, so that he might not be separated from his people. Hence he says that they had thus joined to him, that they might be for a name, and also for a praise and glory.

Words put together for the sake of amplification. God therefore intended to exaggerate more fully the sin of the people, by saying he had done so much for them, in order that he might be celebrated by them, and that his praise and glory might dwell among them.

[ 35 : 46 ] Who could doubt the words of the wise commentator Calvin? Similarly, the renowned preacher Matthew Hendy states, What is described by the prophet here is the greatest honour, we are capable of in this world.

The way some behave, they clearly do not believe as much, and unfortunately amongst them are professing believers. Listen to what Matthew Hendy says, They should be first high in praise for God, for God would accept them, which is true praise.

their friends would admire them, and their enemies envy them. Secondly, that high in name, and their name will not be cut off, continuance and perpetuity of that praise.

And they are high in honour, that is, all the advantages of wealth and power, which would make them great above their neighbours. But he says, they have not heard.

Perhaps it is more proper to say, they have not listened. Had they done so, they would have obeyed. And had they obeyed, they would have enjoyed the blessings of obedience.

[ 37 : 18 ] This is the calling of the prophet, to preach, to proclaim, and to symbolise by actions what God is to his people, and what his people are to God.

and what it means, when God's people, forget him, and forget, what he ought to be to them.

But he will not, as we discover, as you read on in this prophecy, he will not dismiss them. He is a faithful God, but he will deal with their sin, and he will cleanse their iniquity.

As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I cause to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, that they might be unto me for a people, for a name, for a praise, and for a glory.

What a privilege we have. Surely, if it is your privilege, it may never be said of you that you would not.

[ 38 : 42 ] May God encourage you to hear what God the Lord speaks. For he speaks good to our soul. Let us pray. Most merciful God, we would ask that you would encourage us to maintain our relationship with yourself.

Grant to us the grace necessary in order for that to be so. We would pray for your blessing upon your word to that end. Open the eyes of our understanding.

Grant that the lines of communication would always be kept open. Mercifully undertake for us. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always.

Amen.