

Good Friday 2024 - The Robes of Jesus

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] Good afternoon, everyone. Good to see you today. And welcome to our Good Friday service. It's called An Hour at a Cross because we're going to spend the next 60 minutes reflecting and meditating on all that Jesus went through, all that Jesus won, and all that Jesus has done for us through and by his death on the cross.

As you can tell already, it's going to be by nature a quiet and reflective service. It will be times of silence, times when they'll lead us in some reflections and times when we'll listen to some music, some of which will be instrumental tracks and some with words which seem appropriate for today. We're not going to sing any songs together, although two or three worship songs will make an appearance as we go through. We're going to base our time this afternoon around some sections of each of the gospel accounts of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and in particular reflect on the robes that we're told Jesus was dressed in.

But before we begin those reflections, let's pray and let's commit ourselves and our time this afternoon into God's hands. So dear God, thank you for Jesus, and thank you for all that this day means.

Thank you for the opportunity we have today to think about, to consider, to in some way enter into the suffering and the passion of Jesus as he was crucified.

[1 : 43] Lead us, we pray, that we may appreciate in a deeper way all that his death meant then and means now for us and our world today.

May we know, please, your loving presence with us. Amen. I'm going to leave things from the back this afternoon.

You might just want to check that your phones are on silent, please. Just in case. And we'll begin with a short time of silence and then we'll listen to a piece of music as we gather ourselves at the cross of Jesus.

playing next one Thank you.

Thank you.

[3 : 25] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

He was taken to be questioned by the high priest, who in turn then sent him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Here's how John's gospel describes what happens next.

[6 : 39] And they slapped him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they slapped him in the face.

Dear Jesus, that reading there is an insight into the politics of your day, the factions who fought for supremacy in your land.

On the one hand were the religious authorities, the ones who oversaw the temple system, the ones who believed that they were the guardians of righteousness.

These were the authorities you repeatedly critiqued, not least for the way in which they elevated themselves above the people who they were meant to serve.

A sense of superiority in being the moral police of their day. weighing people's people's people's people's people's people's spirits along the way.

[7 : 50] But on the other hand, they were the Roman authorities, the real power holders, who quite literally held the power of life or death over people.

Pontius Pilate here, the local Roman governor, ruling with the authority of Caesar and the one whom the religious leaders needed to convince Jesus if you were to be executed in the way they wanted.

And so here you are, Jesus, being sent from one authority to the other, a pawn in their political game. You'd spoken time and again of your kingdom, the kingdom of God, you called it. A way of life which was more inclusive, more radical, more eternal than any earthly kingdom, whether religious or political.

No wonder that got you into trouble, since you were challenging the very systems which gave these people their power. Pilate asked, are you the king of the Jews?

[9 : 07] And when he talked about your kingdom, he took that as proof that you were, that you are a king. And yet, not quite knowing what to charge you with, it seems he played for time by having you flogged.

It was during this flogging that the soldiers dressed you up for their own game, making a crude crown of thorns and finding, we're told, a purple robe in which to dress you.

Why purple? Well, that was a colour of royalty, the colour worn by Roman senators, the colour of authority and power.

It was a rich, resplendent, expensive colour. Hard to come by in those times. And yet, in their desire to make a visual mockery of your kingdom claims, these soldiers were prepared to put this expensive purple robe on your shoulders.

I wonder how you felt being dressed in purple, Jesus. Perhaps thoughts ran through your head about the ways you'd spoken of your kingdom.

[10 : 27] Illustrating it with pictures of seeds, of yeast, of building. A progressive kingdom of growth from the ground up.

A kingdom for the people. Not a kingdom of oppression that controlled the people. Just a few days before, you'd ridden into town on a donkey.

Again, an illustration that your kingdom was different. That it was humble and lowly. That it was accessible. Not a kingdom dominated by war horses or the trappings of status.

You were a king. You are a king. You are a king. Not of purple. But of peace. And yet here, dressed in purple.

Well, the soldiers were blissfully unaware that many a true word is said in jest. The truth in your life that Pilate didn't recognize.

[11 : 37] The truth of you truly being a king. But not the kind of king. But not the kind of king that these soldiers in their limited awareness could imagine was possible.

Lord Jesus, we're sorry that you and your kingdom were mocked in this way. We're sorry that the religious authorities, the Pilate, that these soldiers didn't stop to consider the truth of your kingdom. But we're also sorry when we sometimes seek to make you into the kind of king you aren't. When we effectively try to dress you in purple to fit our own ideas of who you should be.

Jesus, your ways of inclusion, of love, of compassion and mercy and kindness, these are the radical characteristics of your kingdom.

We're sorry, therefore, when we exclude people. When we fail to show love. When we close our minds or our hearts.

[12 : 56] And we're sorry when we have the temerity to say who's in and who's out of your kingdom. We're sorry when we come across or feel at all superior to others.

So thank you that, yes, you are indeed our king. But thank you that you are a servant king. A king unlike any other kind of king we've ever experienced.

Would you help us please to learn from you and your ways. To follow in your footsteps. To throw off the trappings of wealth.

To shun signs of status. And to instead clothe ourselves in humility. In service. And in love. Come and see.

[14 : 04] Come and see Come and see Come and see the King of Love See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears Soldiers mock, rulers sneer As he lifts the cruel cross Alone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill We worship at your feet Where wrath and mercy meet

And the guilty world is washed by love's pure stream For us he was made sin Oh help me take it in Deep wounds of love cry out Father forgive I worship I worship The Lamb Who was slain Come and weep Come and mourn For your sin that is in there So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and air

All our pride All our greed All our fallenness and shame And the Lord has laid the punishment on him We worship at your feet Where wrath and mercy meet And the guilty world is washed by love's

pure stream For us he was made sin Oh help me take it in Deep wounds of love cry out Father forgive I worship I worship

I worship I worship I worship I worship The Lamb Who was slain Oh we worship at your feet Where wrath and mercy meet You bore my sin Oh you bore my sin Man of heaven Born to earth To restore us to your heaven Here we bow in awe Beneath your searching eyes From your tears Comes our joy From your death Our life shall spring By your resurrection And the resurrection Power we shall rise We worship at your feet We worship at your feet Where wrath and mercy meet And the guilty world is washed by love's pure stream For us he was missing For us he was missing For us he was missing Oh help me take it in Deep wounds of love's pure stream Deep wounds of love cry out Father forgive I worship I worship I worship I worship I worship I worship

[19 : 18] The Lamb Who was slain Who was slain Who was slain The Lamb Who was slain Who was slain I worship Who was slain The Lamb Who was slain The Lamb was slain The Lamb was slain Wounded for me In a similar but slightly different account

When compared with John's Gospel Matthew's Gospel tells the story this way Then the governor's soldiers Took Jesus into the praetorium And gathered the whole company of soldiers around him They stripped him And put a scarlet robe on him And then twisted a crown of thorns And set it on his head They put a staff in his right hand Then they knelt in front of him And mocked him Hail, King of the Jews, they said They spat on him And took the staff And struck him on the head again and again After they had mocked him They took off the robe And put his own clothes on him Then they led him away To crucify him Lord Jesus, there are some obvious similarities

With the way Matthew describes this same part of your story The guards who mocked you The crown of thorns thrust upon your head The beatings you received This time with a staff A stick the soldiers had given you Mimicking a royal scepter, no doubt As they dressed you As they dressed you up As a king And yet here The robe They put on you Is described not as purple But as scarlet I wonder what colour You saw this robe as Perhaps the blood Dripping into your eyes Made it look more red More scarlet than it was Perhaps the low light Made it difficult to tell If it was indeed purple Or red Perhaps the eyewitnesses

Who must have later Shared their stories With the gospel writers Weren't sure themselves Of the colour Some saw a purple robe Some thought it more red looking I guess that discrepancy Makes your good news These gospels All the more believable You know, not denying differences But allowing the confusion in the story To speak to us And perhaps the confusion We sometimes feel in life And yet for whatever reason Matthew here uses A different word than purple To describe this robe On your shoulders Choosing to call it scarlet Or red I wonder if this is deliberate, Jesus Since in the Bible Red is the colour Most often associated with sin

In Isaiah One of the prophets You loved to quote Our sins, it says Are described as Being like scarlet As red As crimson Even though you Jesus, yourself Were without sin You knew full well The devastation That sin causes The time and again In the gospel stories Of your life We see you Confronting sin So over this past week Soon after your Palm Sunday Procession We've seen how you overturned The tables of the money changers In the temple Protesting At the sin of corruption Of exploitation Of making a profit From people's desire To know forgiveness And hope We've seen how you challenged The sin

[24 : 31] Of lust The sin of reducing Someone else To an object Of satisfaction Not as a person To be honoured As made in the image Of God We've seen how you challenged The sin Of greed Calling those Who have much To sell their possessions Imploring us To be generous With our excess So that those With less May have enough To live on We've seen how you challenged The sin of hypocrisy Of saying one thing And doing another The sin of gossip Of seeking to elevate ourselves At the expense Of others The sin of judging others Of criticising people Without regard For the pressures Or circumstances They face And so on And so on It's clear That you knew Jesus How destructive Sin Was

And is For us For our relationship With you For the way In which it stops us From treating One another With your Loving kindness And grace And so there's something Fitting Perhaps That Matthew Describes you As wearing This red Scarlet robe Because in your death You took All that sin All that shame All the consequences Of failing to live In your ways Upon your own shoulders Indeed you're described A little later As literally Being made Sin For us Jesus We can't begin To conceive Of how that Must have felt The sheer Weight

The darkness The darkness The pain Of feeling Of feeling Of feeling The sins Of the world On your shoulders The sins Perhaps Represented By this Blood Red Robe And yet We are So grateful That you did Indeed Not just Take Our sins But that you Take them Away That in your Death Those sins Died With you Lord Jesus We know That you Forgive Without the Need For punishment To be Paid After all You declared Forgiveness For people All the Time Even before You died On the Cross Forgiveness Comes Through Repentance Not Retribution And yet We also Know That we Need Freedom From our Sins Freedom Which comes Not just From your Forgiveness But freedom Which comes From knowing That the Power And the Pervasiveness Of sin Has been Beaten Once and For all That our Sins Because of You Remain Dealt with They remain Dead and Buried For all Eternity Help Help us To receive Your Forgiveness We pray Just as The thief On the Cross Next to You Received Your Forgiveness Thank you That you Have Forgiven Our Sins Help us To forgive Others Who sin Against Us There's a Place Where Mercy Rains And never Dies There's a Place Where Streams Of grace Flow Deep And Wide For all The love I've Ever Found Comes Like A Flood Comes Flowing Down At the cross At the cross I surrender My life I'm in awe Of you I'm in awe Of you Where your love Ran red And my sin Washed white

[29 : 50] I owe I owe All to you I owe All to you Jesus There's a place Where sin and shame Are powerless Where my heart Has peace With God And forgiveness Where my heart Has peace With God And forgiveness Where my heart Has peace with God Where all All the love I've ever Found Comes like a flood Comes flowing down At the cross At the cross I surrender my life

I'm in awe of you I'm in awe of you Where your love Ran red In my sin Washed white I owe I owe To you I owe To you Here My hope is found Here On holy ground Here I bow down Here I bow down Here Arms open Wide Here You save my life Here I bow down Here Here Here I bow At the cross At the cross I surrender My life I'm in awe of you I'm in awe of you Where your love Ran red In my sin Washed white I owe To you I owe To you I owe To you I owe To you Jesus Jesus Savior Jesus Savior The world Your love Ran red Your love Your love Rain Red Your love Rain Red Red Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus As we considered earlier, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' trial and crucifixion all take a slightly different approach.

slightly different approach, and sometimes the events they describe are difficult to marry up in terms of details or as a timeline. That's understandable, I guess. Accounts based on eyewitness reports, accounts clouded by confusion and shock and grief, accounts often shared years later when the Gospels were compiled from spoken stories. For example, it's only in Luke's Gospel that we read about Jesus being sent by Pilate to see King Herod, but it's an account worth reflecting on, because here's how Luke describes this encounter.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he'd been wanting to see him. From what he'd heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort.

[34 : 06] He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day, Herod and Pilate became friends. Before this, they'd been enemies.

Dear Jesus, I wonder how you felt being sent on to see King Herod. Yet another example of the authorities playing political pass the parcel with you. This King Herod, Herod Antipas, the one you'd criticised as being a fox, and the son of Herod the Great, the king who tried to have you killed as an infant. Well, we're told that he was keen to meet you, hoping for you to entertain him with a miracle or two. No wonder you didn't say anything. There was nothing to be gained at this stage with trying to reason with Herod. After all, it was he who had beheaded your cousin John the Baptist after John had criticised Herod for illegally marrying his own sister-in-law.

I guess sometimes you knew that silence speaks volumes. And yet what's fascinating is that we're told Herod dressed you, Jesus, in an elegant robe.

Was this the same purple robe? Maybe the same scarlet robe that the soldiers addressed you in? Maybe. Maybe. That's all part of the haziness of some of the details of this hectic time.

But the word that's used here isn't purple or scarlet, but elegant. A very different word in the original Greek language in which this account was written.

[36 : 35] Indeed, this word, elegant, can be translated as glorious or as splendid. But often, it's translated literally as white.

It's unusual, perhaps, to think of you in a white robe during your trial and crucifixion, since colours of purple and scarlet dominate the portrayals we've seen.

And yet elsewhere in the Gospels, your robes are indeed described in this glorious, resplendent way. Not least, during your transfiguration, when your clothes are described as being as dazzling as a flash of lightning.

It's a description which echoes the way the prophet Daniel describes God, the one he calls the Ancient of Days, whose clothing was as white as snow.

Jesus, we don't know if the description of this robe Herod placed on you as being white is a bit of poetic license from Luke, or if Herod really did place a white robe on your shoulders.

[37 : 53] Perhaps we wouldn't be surprised if he did. Maybe it was all part of the authorities' mockery of you, dressing you in the colour of innocence and purity.

Maybe it was Herod's way of signalling to Pilate that he didn't want to sentence you to death, given all the fury he'd already provoked at his execution of John the Baptist.

But whether it was Herod's choice or Luke's interpretation, it seems clear, Jesus, that we're meant to see this white robe as being significant to your story.

Perhaps we can see why. Because in you, through your death, and by your resurrection, the scarlet of our sins have been washed as white as snow.

The stain of sin has been erased. The consequences of sin, of darkness, of death, have been defeated.

[39 : 06] And we, because of you, can take our place with you and all the saints, dressed, as the book of Revelation later describes, in white.

Symbolic of the freedom and forgiveness which comes with and through you. Lord Jesus, in each of these three robes, the purple, the scarlet, and the white, it's supremely ironic that those seeking to condemn you, those who would eventually kill you, have inadvertently illustrated the profound truth of your crucifixion and resurrection.

that you, the servant king, take the sins of the world on your shoulders in order that through your death and by your resurrection, those sins may be washed clean.

That death and darkness will be defeated and that we can live afresh as your people, people who you love and always will.

Jesus, thank you that even in this familiar, albeit fatal, story, we can still find new threads, new hope, new signs of life that even in death, there is still the glorious truth of your love, your victory, and your freedom to be found.

[41 : 00] Methodist trying to hold that pen out.

The compass of earth will look at the inn in his ■ and the faith and together tou or own thrill Amen. Co30 Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[42 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[45 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[47 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

May you go with God's blessing.