

When Did We See You Naked

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[0 : 00] ...anything about it at all. So it's probably... It's probably just a special message for you that you have to take home and work it out.

It was supposed to be Genesis 3, 8 to 13, and I didn't put on my glasses until you started reading and found there was something a little peculiar. Today I want to talk about the...

We're still on this picture from Matthew 25 of the Son of Man coming with the angels and in great glory and coming as judge and dividing people into sheep and goats.

And when asked why, he explains that to the people who are blessed and enter into the inheritance God has for them, it's because of their sensitivity to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the prisoner, and the sick.

And we've been looking at that, and today we've come to that particular category in which Christ speaks to them and says, you know, I was naked and you clothed me.

[1 : 29] When did we see you naked? Well, insofar as you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me. And then again to those who were the goats and going under the curse, you did not welcome me.

Naked you did not clothe me. So somehow they missed out. I want to talk today about being naked, but one or two things that I just want to tell you about by way of introduction.

We take a great deal of time and trouble and effort and expense to cover our nakedness.

That's why I wore a tag today, because, you know, I might have succeeded in deceiving you. In fact, someone did me the great honor of saying I look like I belong downtown today.

So I, that's, this is my new \$500 suit, which I've purchased recently for such occasions as this so that I can deceive you.

[2 : 35] And I have on a \$200 pair of shoes, but they're getting worn out now. My first suit cost \$75. This one you could spit through and that one you couldn't even cut through.

So there's a poem by a fellow named Haussmann that talks about the trouble we go to when he says, this is his sort of morning ritual.

His poem is, The sun is up and up must I to wash and dress and God knows why. Ten thousand times I've washed and dressed and all to do again.

I don't know if you have sentiments like that early in the morning. But the problem of dealing with our nakedness and preparing ourselves for the world in which we live and work is a problem that we face every day.

I happen to be a minister in the Anglican Church and they've always had trouble with the character of Anglican ministers.

[3 : 43] So in order to do what they can, they usually hide them in robes so that you can't see what you've got. They have long black robes and long white robes and all sorts of things they do to disguise you so that you won't become disappointed on first encounter.

So clothing is very, very important. And it becomes important. I notice that some of my better drawings have been put up today.

I know. But just for your benefit, I'll go back to this one.

Now, this is Adam and Eve. And the setting is Genesis 3.18, which we might have read today, but we didn't.

And it tells the story of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Adam and Eve went among the trees and hid themselves.

[5 : 04] That's what you have illustrated here. And the Lord God calls out and says, Adam, where are you? And Adam replies, I'm here.

I heard you. I hid. For I was naked. And the Lord asks a very profound question of Adam. Who told you you were naked?

I think that's a fairly profound question. Because there is a great sort of personal mystery of our nakedness. No other creature in the whole of creation seems to be concerned about it.

In fact, they're all fairly casual. But we, as in some way, spiritual creatures are very concerned about it and go to enormous trouble to try and cover up our nakedness.

And it seems, you see, that you have, from the very first instance, that somehow we are ashamed of ourselves. So that shame and nakedness go together.

[6 : 21] I don't know if you remember, during the liberation of Europe at the end of the Second World War, which some of you would remember, Life magazine, which was great on pictures, showed what was happening to women to women who had collaborated with the Nazis in France.

And they were taken and publicly tried in the community. Their hair was all cut off. They were stripped naked and forced to walk out of town.

And that was the terrible humiliation. The shame was, in a sense, experienced by them of their betrayal of their country as they were forced to do that.

So that there is, I mean, nakedness is a part of our dreams. Nakedness is a part of our anxiety. And somehow there is, the fact that we have been given a body within which to live our lives, and the fact of the nakedness of that body is one that, is something that, it seems almost irrational when you think about it.

Some people try to break through it and say, well, it doesn't matter, but usually they're young and splendid of body. Most of us get past that fairly soon.

[7 : 50] And it no longer is something we want to relate to other people through. So we cover it up. That's, so that it's that problem. It's the same problem you remember.

I mean, it relates to that problem of the emperor's new clothes, where, remember, these cunning tailors came along and had these beautiful looms that were working day and night with nothing apparently in them.

And they were importing at great cost the finest silks from the furthest parts of the world. And they were putting together the emperor's new clothes. And they were of such style and such beauty and such quality of material that unless you were wise, you wouldn't even be able to see it.

And so everybody made sure they could see it, even though it wasn't there. And you remember that it was when the emperor finally paraded himself down the main street and the small boy said he was naked, that he, in a sense, blew the delusion because we were very concerned to cover our nakedness.

And so when it's the same deception, I think, that Christ speaks about in the book of Revelation when he talks to the Ephesians.

[9 : 12] And he's talking to them as a church and he tells them that instead of, in fact, having gold and eyesight and beautiful clothes, that they are poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked.

And Christ sees them in their nakedness and counsels them to buy from him gold refined by fire that you may be rich, white garments to clothe you and keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen.

That it's one of the kind of, I guess, basic realities of our human life that we don't want to be seen for whom we are.

That our life, I mean, I'm caricaturing it, I suppose, but it comes close to the truth, I think. Our life consists in establishing a delusion and then scrambling to maintain it among the people who have accepted it.

And that's what life is. That scramble to maintain the delusion. And that's how we live our lives.

[10 : 40] And yet it is the concern and the business of God having created us and given us what one person calls this body of humiliation that we are very anxious about it.

And Christ identifies that anxiety in the Sermon on the Mount when he says to you, Why are you anxious and fearful? Consider the lilies of the field, they grow, they neither toil nor spin.

Yet I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. So that if God so clothed the grass of the field, then what about his ability to clothe you?

So you see that it is God's business in a sense, that he makes it his business and Christ makes it God's business that we should be clothed in an appropriate way.

When I was a small boy, I was very attracted to a large book that was on a bottom shelf in our home and it was called Dante's Inferno.

[12:00] I've never read Dante's Inferno. The advantage of this book is that it was full of pictures and all the pictures were classical pictures of hundreds and hundreds of people in the nude, which always intrigues small boys.

And the significance of that was that Dante was portraying the dam.

These were pictures of hell and hell in Dante's book was that the damned were thought of as naked.

You know, that their shame was constantly there. They could not escape from the perpetual shame of their nakedness.

And, you know, and I think that probably the New Age has some problems with this because I think that I'm not sure that they recognize that the basic human reality is that I have this sense of shame and that I don't want to be seen in my nakedness.

[13:26] Spiritually or physically, I don't want that to happen. So that, you know, I think one of the conventions of our society, which was very much influenced by the Bible at one time and not so much at the moment, was that marriage was a covenant of love between two people and that you didn't reveal your nakedness to one another until that covenant was established.

In other words, you didn't reveal your nakedness until the covenant of love was there. and because, you know, it's not just, you know, physical nakedness, it's nakedness of mind and nakedness of soul and nakedness of emotions.

All those things come out in the relationship of marriage and unless there is love, then nakedness is, can be very repulsive.

I say that, you know, I mean, you can modify that statement, but I think you know what I mean.

There's a terrible story in the Old Testament of one of the stepchildren of King David, I guess one of his children, fell much in love with another sort of half-brother or half-sister whose name was Tamar and she was apparently a very beautiful creature and the brother whose name was Amnon was totally captivated by this beautiful creature and longed to have her for himself even though he couldn't, you know, it wasn't really permissible.

And so he deceived her and raped her. And the scriptures with the terrible matter-of-factness with which scripture expresses the problem.

[15:59] He stripped and raped her and then the next line is that he hated her with a very great hatred. You know, that there was something wrong about the relationship and that there wasn't love, there was hatred because of people not being able to tolerate that.

Well, that's the problem that we run into and it's very strange that one of the essential ministries of Christ is to us in our nakedness.

And one of the ministries that he wants those who believe and trust in him to take up is to do the work of clothing the naked.

Remember, Christ's ministry is that he comes to feed our hunger. You know, this is my body. Eat this.

This is my blood. Drink this. He speaks to our estrangement and calls us to relate to him. He speaks to our nakedness and calls us to be clothed with humility, to be clothed with righteousness.

[17:27] All those things he calls us that we will cover our nakedness. And you know the lovely picture in the book of the Revelation, you know, that I first encountered in a Negro spiritual when he says I'm going to put on my long white robe down by the riverside.

You know, that God has provided a robe for me so that I stand before him not in the shame of my nakedness but in the glory of his garment that he has provided, the robe that he has provided for me so that Christ Christ does this.

And having, you know, this is Christ's ministry to us but it's also our ministry to Christ that you learn from here because we meet Christ in his humanity and in his humiliation.

Remember, he is the son of man who is our judge in glory but he came to us in humiliation. And it was important for us to recognize him.

I was hungry and you fed me, Christ says. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

[18:51] And so Christ identifies himself. I was naked and you clothed me. It's a very peculiar kind of statement.

But it's a very powerful statement too. And it's powerful for this reason that I would like just to illustrate to you. Not only powerful but terribly cogent.

remember the the the the the the the soldiers at the foot of the cross tossing dice for the seamless robe of Christ while Christ was nailed naked to the cross.

There he was. and this this reality is you know I mean it gives a terrible poignance doesn't it to the statement I was naked and you clothed me.

That same picture of Christ hung naked on the cross is for most of the Christian world the object of their devotion.

[20 : 22] That this is the Christ whom they love. Even though he is portrayed naked on a cross.

That that's the object of their devotion. That they do not hate him. Now I think there's a strange poignance to this fact in that that Islam you know which which was begun in in the fifth century after Christ tried to purify the worship of God by taking away the terrible and humiliating claim that God stripped naked died on a cross.

That is intolerable to believe that God would ever submit to that. That cannot be God.

we know from the scriptures that cursed is the man who hangs on the cross. And that this cannot be God.

There is one God and he doesn't do this kind of thing. Well you see that's that's what makes this statement I was I was naked and you clothed me.

[22 : 00] You clothed me in a sense with your love and with your devotion. And so that for a Christian this is not a repulsive picture that inspires hatred.

It's the most profound picture that inspires love. Though it could inspire repulsion and hatred. but you see when Christ talked about what he had come to do and he talked about various sacrifices that have been made and in Hebrews Christ is quotes from the Old Testament says a body hast thou prepared me.

Christ in his humiliation takes on a body and is stripped naked and crucified before people.

See that's very much the heart of the faith. That's when Paul says I am resolved to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. he wanted you to make sure you understood the centrality of this.

[23 : 22] This is God in our world. And that's what Christianity is all about. And anything that you call Christian that you can't relate to this reality is perhaps not Christian even.

Because this is the central reality. One last thing with which I will quit at this point is that your sense and my sense of perpetual nakedness of which we are fundamentally ashamed and give much of our life to trying to cover it one way or another.

The reason is that I think that Paul describes when he says here indeed we groan and long to put on our heavenly dwelling so that by putting it on we may not be found naked.

The peculiar consciousness of our awareness, consciousness of our nakedness is the recognition resurrection.

I think unspoken and certainly unarticulated that our nakedness is ultimately to be transformed by a resurrection body.

[24 : 59] You know, that at the heart of the Christian faith is the resurrection. resurrection. And it's a bodily resurrection.

And the resurrection body is, you know, that when Paul says of the Corinthians that they long to put on this new dwelling, this new body in which they live so that they will not be found naked.

And so in a sense, you can see Christ's whole mission is in terms of clothing our nakedness through his death and resurrection whereby we put on a new dwelling, a new body which he has prepared for us.

So you see that when he calls us to share in clothing the naked, he's calling us to the most profound responsibility in the whole of our Christian faith that we don't stand before one another or before God in our sinful condemnation.

We stand clothed with the righteousness of Christ. and ultimately with the resurrected body. Let me say a prayer. Our God, we are very anxious in our hearts to be clothed and not to be naked.

[26 : 50] We cannot stand in ourselves and as ourselves before you. Da man trade with .

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