



“From Rags to Righteous”

I want to talk to you about one of our most original and endearing Christmas traditions: **The Ugly Christmas Sweater.**

Sweaters decorated for Christmas made their appearance in the 1950's. They were known as “Jingle Bell Sweaters,” and featured Christmas themed decorations. The sweaters were not intended to be ugly.

The Google says that the first ever ugly sweater party was hosted in 2002 in Vancouver, British Columbia by two men named Chris Boyd and Jordan Birch.

Every year since, what they call *The Original Ugly Christmas Sweater Party* has been held at the Commodore Ballroom.

The annual party has a dress code

What do you think it is? Yep - An ugly Christmas sweater. You won't be admitted without one.

Pinnacle Peak Steakhouse in Scottsdale AZ has an unusual dress code. If anybody comes in wearing a necktie, a server will sneak up on them with a pair of scissors and cut it off. The clipped necktie then joins thousands of others hanging from the ceiling.



You might recall the episode of Seinfeld in which Jerry was invited to join the exclusive Friars Club. When he arrived, he was initially denied entrance. The club had a dress code: Men must wear a suit or sport jacket.

No shirt... No shoes... No service is now, **No mask... No Entering.** Thanks, COVID19.

Long ago, before COVID19, couples were married in ceremonies that included invited guests. The bride and groom may not have insisted on a dress code for their guests, but most if not all of their friends and family adhered to basic wardrobe appropriateness.

There is a wedding with a dress code in the Gospel of Matthew

To be accurate, it is a parable Jesus told using a wedding celebration to describe an important truth about Heaven. It reads (in part) like this:

Mat 22:2 The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son...

Mat 22:11 ... when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.

Mat 22:12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

In many ancient cultures, a king provided garments for his guests to insure that they would appear before him properly dressed. In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, Joseph was a prisoner in an Egyptian jail. When the Pharaoh called for him to come and interpret his dreams, "they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh" (Genesis 41:14).



The king in Jesus' parable furnished the invited guests with a "wedding garment." To come to the celebration and refuse the garment was a terrible insult. The man without the proper wedding garment could expect to be denied entrance or to be thrown-out.

A Bible parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a teaching aid to simplify spiritual truths. Listen to what Jesus said next.

Mat 22:13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

You were definitely not expecting anything like that. Maybe ask him to leave; but "outer darkness... Weeping and gnashing of teeth?"

Where is that, anyway? It's not on earth. That is language the Bible uses to describe Hell. It is a place of separation from God; a place of eternal, conscious torment.

It might be good to pause and identify the main players & places in the parable:

- 🔴 The King represents God the Father.
- 🔴 The Son represents Jesus Christ.
- 🔴 The wedding celebration represents the joy of being in Heaven for eternity.
- 🔴 Those wearing a wedding garment are people who have believed in Jesus Christ and are thereby properly dressed.
- 🔴 The man without a garment represents all who in unbelief reject Jesus as their Savior.

Heaven has a strict dress code



Any person without the proper garment violates Heaven's dress code, and not only can he or she not enter - **You are remanded to Hell for eternity.**

What is so important about this garment? Why do we need it?

We can begin to answer that by explaining how we are dressed without this garment.

When God looks at a person, from Heaven, He sees him or her differently than we do. There is a passage in an Old Testament book, the Book of Zechariah, that will explain what I mean.

In the passage, the High Priest of Israel, who's name was Joshua, was on earth in the Jewish Temple performing his duties.

(This is not the Joshua who led Israel into their Promised Land. Joshua was a popular Jewish name).

Zec 3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD...

- 🕯 On the earth, Joshua was ministering in the Jewish Temple.
- 🕯 In the unseen supernatural realm, Joshua was standing before the LORD

The High Priest had a unique wardrobe that was his dress code. His garments were magnificent. He wore, for example, a breastplate with twelve precious stones - one to represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel. These jewels were in gold settings. In the first row, there was a ruby, a topaz, and an emerald; in the second row, a carbuncle, a sapphire, and a diamond; in the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and in the fourth row, a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper.



The High Priest wore a total of eight different holy garments. Of these, four were of the same type worn by all priests, and four were unique to him.

Listen to this description of his garments:

The high priest had two sets of holy garments: The "golden garments," and a set of white "linen garments" which he wore only on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On that day, he would change his holy garments four times, beginning in the golden garments but changing into the linen garments for the two moments when he would enter the Holy of Holies, and then change back again into the golden garments after each time. He would immerse in the ritual bath before each change of garments, washing his hands and his feet after removing the garments and again before putting the other set on.

If in our passage it was the Day of Atonement, Heaven was watching Joshua as he went through the rituals, changing from one outfit and back again.

You know the expression, You can't judge a book by its cover? Joshua looked his best, 'covered' by his beautiful and costly garments, and washed. He didn't look that way to everyone:

Zec 3:3 Now Joshua [the High Priest] was clothed with **filthy garments...**

The word "filthy" means *smearred with human excrement*.

There's a scene in *Robin Hood - Prince of Thieves*, the Kevin Costner version, involving filthy rags. A master of disguise, Robin Hood robed himself with the torn and tattered garments of a beggar in order to avoid being detected while visiting Maid Marian in the church.

To make it even more believable, he picked-up dung from the road, and rubbed it all over his robe. He was filthy.



Warning: The next few minutes might gross you out. To put it another way - little boys will love it!

I think you'd be surprised at how many people each year fall into cess pools or septic tanks.

Ralph Santos, 88, was weed whacking in his backyard when a cesspool collapsed creating a sink hole. Santos fell into the hole, holding his head above the contents of the cesspool using the electrical cord from the weed whacker. He was found a short time later by his wife, who called 911.

In other 'filthy' news... A man charged with the first-degree murder of a New Orleans police officer, delayed the jury selection in his trial by rubbing feces on his own face, head, and mouth in the courtroom. He was declared incompetent to stand trial.

In 2018, a United Airlines flight bound from Chicago to Hong Kong was diverted to an emergency landing in Alaska when a passenger started (quote) "smearing feces everywhere."

Did you know that there are several conditions that can make your breath smell like feces? Bowel obstruction, ketoacidosis, liver failure, and something I can't pronounce whose acronym is GERD.

I'm not trying to gross you out. The fact is, this **is** an exceedingly gross image that the Bible uses to get the point across.

Did Joshua fall into sewage rushing to the Temple? Why would he minister in the Temple in such stained and spoiled garments?

He didn't fall - **but Adam did!** We call the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the "fall."



God created them in His image, with genuine free-will.

Not only did being in the image of God mean they had to have free-will. It was also necessary for them to have a choice because love cannot be forced, or it ceases to be love.

Our original parents chose poorly. They “fell,” bringing ruin upon God’s creation. They saw themselves as naked. God saw them as being clothed in filthy rags.

We left Joshua in the Temple. You are being shown the same man, in the same garments, from two perspectives.

- 🕯 From the natural and earthly perspective, his garments were *fine*.
- 🕯 From the supernatural and heavenly perspective, his garments were *filthy*.

The Bible describes every human being that way

The Bible says, “all of our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.” God sees us, in our natural state, as if we are wearing filthy rags. You and I are feces-breathed, dung-smearing, cess pool floaters.

None of us are righteous. We all fall short of the glory of God. We are all sinners.

There are so many really, really evil people in the world that it can be hard to believe you are too sinful to be allowed into Heaven. That’s where God’s Law can clarify. Jesus once said,

Mat 5:21 “You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’

Mat 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...



Each of us has been angry. It is not equivalent to murder, but it is evidence that something is wrong deep within us.

Billy Graham often said, "The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart." All of us have broken many of God's laws in our hearts.

Breaking even one law, one time, is more than enough to keep us out of Heaven.

- 🕯️ Have you ever lied, no matter how white the lie was?
- 🕯️ Ever stolen anything, no matter how small?
- 🕯️ Have you ever coveted something?

The answer is, "Yes." We have all broken God's law; we are all guilty. The fact that someone might be a worse sinner doesn't change the fact I am a sinner.

God intervened on behalf of Joshua:

Zec 3:4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and **I will clothe you with rich robes.**"

The robe God was speaking of wasn't a physical garment. It was unseen by men on earth, but visible to beings in Heaven.

You need a robe to enter Heaven; a very particular robe. In another place in the Bible, in the Old Testament Book Isaiah, we read,

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with **the robe of righteousness...**" (Isaiah 61:10).



God can provide you with a robe, called here "the robe of righteousness." With it, you are a welcomed guest; you are properly dressed for Heaven.

In the wedding garment story Jesus told; and in the verse we just read; the robe is **given** to you: "He has clothed me... He has covered me..."

The same was true with Joshua. It was **given** to him, freely.

The robe of righteousness is not deserved, and it cannot be earned. It must be given to you - it is a free gift from God. We call this free gift of God salvation by grace, through faith

Where do we get this robe of righteousness? It is only found in one place: At the Cross of Jesus Christ.

His death on the Cross was sufficient to 'robe' all sinners. He is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe in Him.

There's a verse that explains Jesus' death on the Cross as if it were an exchange. It reads like this:

2Co 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

A paraphrase of that is, "God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God."

Jesus was severely beaten prior to His Crucifixion.

He was stripped of His clothing, nailed naked to the Cross.

Heaven saw Him differently. He had righteousness to give, as you would give a robe, to all who would believe in Him.



Think of it as a one-sided gift exchange. Jesus gives you His righteousness and takes upon Himself your filthiness.

Jesus gives you the robe of righteousness you must have in order to enter Heaven and avoid Hell.

It is an exclusive garment

Jesus alone has the robe of righteousness to give.

He is the unique God-man, the only One righteous, Who rose from the dead showing He alone has power to save you.

- 🔴 No religious leader, or religion, can give you the robe.
- 🔴 No philosopher, or philosophy, can give you the robe.
- 🔴 No other supernatural being can give you the robe.

I am sure some of you frustrate yourselves by playing golf. Even if you're not a golfer, you've heard of the Masters Tournament.

Since 1949, a green jacket has been awarded to the champion. It is a garment you can only get in one place on earth.

The robe we are talking about can only be gotten at the Cross.

All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; none of us is righteous enough to deserve Heaven.

What we deserve for sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.



God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You must receive your robe *before* you die. There is no chance to ask for it after death.

The exchange takes place the instant you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Again I emphasize that the robe is given freely. At the Friars Club, Jerry Seinfeld's problem was solved when the management provided a jacket for him. All he had to do was accept it.

A fun-fact about the robe: Once you've received it, you're encouraged to adorn it

The whole of Isaiah 61:10 reads, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful 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 with ornaments, **And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**"

You are given your robe of righteousness when you receive Jesus as your Savior. Afterwards you have the privilege of adorning your robe with "jewels."

In my role as a law enforcement Chaplain, I've over the years worked with the Lion's Clubs. At their meetings they wear vests that are adorned with pins and patches they've received in service to the club and the community. Lots of service clubs do the same.

You don't *earn* or *add to* your salvation; but you can receive rewards to adorn your robe.



In the passage in which the apostle Paul talks about our being rewarded by Jesus for our good works after we have been saved, he describes them as "gold, silver, precious stones" (First Corinthians 3:12).

I want to look good for Jesus. It's not a competition with other believers. It's between Him and me.

*The Bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;*

I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of Grace

*Not at the crown He giveth, but on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land*

If you're a believer in Christ, stay busy be-dazzling your robe by discovering the good works that Jesus has before ordained for you to walk in.

If you are not a believer in Christ, consider this

You've seen celebrities on the red carpet.

As they make their way towards the event, they stop to chat with reporters. They almost always ask the women especially, "Who are you wearing?" To which they answer Vera Wang, or Armani, or Calvin Klein.

If you're not in Christ... Who are you wearing, hoping to get into Heaven without His robe? Buddha? Joseph Smith? L. Ron Hubbard?

- ❗ None of them died for you.
- ❗ None of them took upon themselves your filthy rags in exchange for the righteousness needed to enter Heaven.



- ❶ None of them rose from the dead with the power to save you, and to sanctify you, and to glorify you.

No Jesus... No robe... No Heaven

