

393 “The fine linen of righteousness”

(Suggested: Copy, paste and read in Subfolder: Almighty God)

As we were reminded last time from Psalm 119.54, those who follow Almighty God through His Son Jesus Christ are a pilgrim people, walking together on a steady, sometimes difficult, path towards the assured glories-in-Christ that are yet to come.

This week we consider some present and future glories, revealed to us in God’s Word for our blessing, encouragement and comfort. Revelation Chapter 19 is set towards the end of the approaching 7-year period of tribulation on the earth. Without going into detail again here due to limited space, (but see on www.fsmins.org / For Christian Believers / 04 / the free pdf book “Whatever Next?” for in-depth coverage), this period, covered in Revelation Chapters 4-19, is a re-running of Daniel’s “seventieth week” (Daniel 9.27). It is a time of God’s judgment on the Jews for their rejection of their Messiah in the first running of the 70th week (AD 26-33), and on the Gentile nations for their rejection of Almighty God and their ill-treatment of His covenant people the Jews (egs., Genesis 12.3 / Matthew 25.31-46). These seven years are referred to as “the years of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30.7) and “great tribulation” (Matthew 24.21,29), when Satan through the antichrist figure will be harder at work than ever (eg., Revelation 12.9).

These Reflections accept the view that the true Church, the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5.27), will have been removed from this earth before this 7-year tribulation period; (for the scriptural justification for this view see above, “Whatever Next?”). This brings us to the wonderful scene in Revelation Chapter 19 when the time for “the marriage of the Lamb is come” (v.7). In preparation for the marriage, the Lamb’s wife “was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (19.8, KJV, the Greek reads “of *the* saints”).

So the Lamb’s wife, as the Bride of Christ, is made up of “the saints” – ordinary Christian folk like us - who are clothed in “the fine linen of righteousness”. That is quite a statement! For a start, it reminds us that all believers in Christ, not just a few “specials”, are termed “saints” (see the opening verses of many of the New Testament epistles for example), a status conferred solely by God’s grace with zero merit of our own (eg., Ephesians 2.8-10).

Next, we find that the English words “fine linen” have significance elsewhere in God’s Word (see your Concordance), and are drawn from slightly different Hebrew and Greek words, each of which signifies particular truth. While linen was common in everyday use for clothing and bedding (eg., Mark 14.51-52) it also came in much higher quality. Thus the curtains of the tabernacle and its outer court were to be made of “fine twined linen” with various colours (Exodus 26.1; 27.9), as were the priests’ garments (Exodus 28.5-8, 15, 39-42), implying purity and holiness. Royal and other wealthy households used “vestures of fine linen” (egs., for Joseph, Genesis 41.42 / for Mordecai, Esther 8.15 / and for that “certain rich man”, Luke 16.19), implying status and riches.

And then most tellingly, fine linen, of as good a quality as could be afforded, was also used for the burial of the dead, both in longer lengths (Greek, “sindona”, Mark 15.46), and smaller strips (Greek, “othonia”, John 20.5): the body of the Lord Jesus clearly merited the very best “fine linen”.

The wonder is that in God’s sight we, the saints, are already “arrayed in fine linen”, our garments denoting our God-granted, Christ-achieved righteousness. (Some time spent with your New Testament and Concordance on the word “righteousness” will spell out just what this righteousness involves, and what it cost the Lord God to make it available). As with “the tribulation saints” of Revelation 7.9-17 (those who will come to faith in Christ, and likely martyrdom, during the tribulation period (13.15b)), our robes of “fine linen of righteousness” have been made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (7.14b).

Now we will all be conscious of the gulf between God’s view of our already-granted righteousness, and our own view of our still sinful, splotchy lives on the other. The Lord in His mercy knows of this gulf better than we do! - which explains His patient work of “sanctification” by the Holy Spirit, in which the gulf between the spiritual reality and the practical reality is being gradually reduced (eg., I Corinthians 1.2 / Ephesians 5.26 / I Thessalonians 3.13 / Hebrews 10.10,14 / Jude 1). But come what may, in God’s sight we are already righteous and sanctified because of the blood of the Lamb shed on our behalf.

Please God many more will be brought to this saving faith in Christ in these dark days, so that they too can be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white ... the righteousness of the saints”.