

Isaiah 61:10-11

Snowfall - This year it started already back on October 16th - as early as I think I've ever seen it - and we received even more **after** that, although right **now** it's all gone. Today I'd like to ask you to think about how you will **feel** the morning after our first really **big** snowfall of the season. My guess is that your feelings will cover a pretty **broad** spectrum - ranging from **worried** (for those who have been through a serious winter **accident**), to **not too** thrilled (for those who have to **remove** the snow from your driveways and sidewalks), all the way to **ecstatic** (for the children who love to **play** in the snow). My reason for asking the question in the first place, is simply to illustrate that different things bring **joy** to different people, for a **variety** of different reasons. And with that in mind, I'd like each of you to take just a few seconds right now, to think about the things which make **you** a **happy** person ... (pause) ...

What kind of things did you **think** of? If you're like **most** people, your first thoughts probably centered around your **physical** blessings - things like your **family** and **friends**, or your **home** and **car** and earthly **possessions**. Maybe you're happy because it wasn't so **busy** at work this past week; or because you finished all your **homework** and still had time left over to **play** your favorite video game. Maybe it was because your children **listened** and **behaved** especially well yesterday; or because you finally got some much-needed extra **sleep**; or because you ate your favorite **meal** on Wednesday night. Or maybe, you're happy today because **Christmas** is coming soon, with all the **multiple** joys that it brings. But I wonder how many of you thought of the fact that being in **church** makes you happy! That's one of the things which **King David** thought of. He said in Psalm 122, "*I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the **house** of the **LORD**.'*"

That's also the direction in which the Prophet **Isaiah** would point us. Our text says, "*I will rejoice **greatly** in the Lord,*" literally that means, "I will **rejoice** to **rejoice** in the LORD!" Interestingly enough, the two reasons which Isaiah lists for his rejoicing are both **spiritual**, and they both apply to **us**. So, as we consider our sermon text for this morning, let's **Rejoice Greatly In The LORD** - because He has clothed us with the garments of **salvation**, and He will faithfully **keep** all His **promises** to us.

I'm sure you've all heard the old saying, "**Clothes** make the **man**." It reminds me of the story of The Prince and the Pauper - a story about two boys who looked enough alike to be **identical twins**. One was the heir to his father's

throne, while the other was a poor, starving **peasant**. Disney even did their own version of the story called Mickey and the Prince. At any rate, these two boys exchanged **positions** in life for a while, simply by exchanging **clothes**. So, at least in that case, “clothes really **did** make the man.”

There are also cases **today** where “clothes make the man.” For example, if you go in for a job interview, and you dress in your everyday “**grubbies**,” you probably won’t make a very good **impression** on the interviewer. And so, even though you may be a very hard **worker**, and even though you may in fact be the **best person** for the job, you probably wouldn’t **get** it. **First impressions** are sometimes very **important**, and often in those cases “clothes make the man.”

Our text reminds us that **God** is concerned about our clothes **too**, but **not** in the ways which I just described. Rather, God wants us to be clothed with the garments of **salvation**, and with the robe of **righteousness**. These are some very **special** clothes. Where can you **find** a robe of righteousness? You would probably get some pretty strange **looks** if you walked into a department store in the Twin Cities, and told them you wanted to buy a robe of **righteousness**! Such a thing can’t be bought in a department store, and you won’t find it **online** either.

In fact, you can’t even **make** one. People in the past have **tried**. Do you remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector? When the Pharisee prayed to God, he enumerated all the good things which **he** had **done** - like **tithing** of all his goods, and **fasting** more often than was necessary. He seemed to be **especially** thankful to God because he was **not** like the miserable **tax collector**, who was also praying in the Temple. That Pharisee felt confident that he had **made** an impressive robe of righteousness for himself out of his own **deeds**. But God was **not** impressed. In fact, God accepted the prayer of the **tax collector** instead of the prayer of the Pharisee. Why? Because that tax collector was very much **aware** of the fact that he was a **sinner**, and that he needed **help**. On the other hand, the **Pharisee** thought he could save **himself** through his own **works**.

God makes it clear to us that that is **not** possible. Man is born in **sin**, and the imagination of man’s heart is **only** evil **all** the time. Paul said, “*I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing.*” We **want** to do what is **right**, but all too often our Old Adam wins out, and we end up doing what is **wrong** instead. If we try to weave a robe of righteousness for **ourselves** out of our **own** works, we will end up with nothing but filthy **rags**!

And so, if we are ever going to **have** a robe of righteousness, it must come from somewhere **else**. Our text says, “*(God) has clothed me in garments of salvation’ With a robe of righteousness he covered me.*” All the action is on **His** part. We do **nothing**. That’s the way it always **has** been, and that’s the way it always **will** be. **God** clothes us with the robe of righteousness - and that robe is **Christ**. What God actually does here, is to paint a rather vivid **picture** for us. When God puts **Christ** on us - like a **robe** - He **covers** our vile, sinful, human bodies with a perfect and holy garment. Then He no longer sees how **sinful** we are. Rather, He sees only the perfect **righteousness** of **Christ** - the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

That fact should mean a great deal to us, because if God had **not** given us that robe of righteousness, we would still be under His **wrath**. God **hates** sin, because it **destroys** the beauty of His creation, including even the **peak** of that creation - mankind. About mankind God says, “*Every one of them has turned away. Altogether they have become rotten. There is no one who does good. There is not even one.*” When man turns away from God and wallows around in the **mud** of sin, he gets covered with its **filth** and **grime**, and is truly **ugly** in God’s sight. But God has taken care of our needs. He has given a robe of **righteousness** - to **us**, and to **all** people. These garments of salvation which God has provided for us are truly beautiful. Isaiah compared them to the clothes which a bride and groom would wear on their **wedding** day. What could be more beautiful than that? But, think of all the **expense** which a bridal couple and their attendants go through in order to look **just right** for that wedding day. Quite often it amounts to **thousands** of dollars! Thank the LORD that while the garments of salvation are even **more** valuable, because they bring us back to **God** - nevertheless, they **cost** us **nothing**. God **gives** them to us. And that in itself is a tremendous reason to **Rejoice Greatly In The LORD**. But there’s also **another** reason.

Rejoice Greatly In The LORD because He will faithfully keep all His **promises** to us. It’s difficult to find a “**sure thing**” in this world. Just about the time we figure some football team, or some politician can’t **lose** - what happens? They turn around and lose **miserably**! Our world is full of **changes** and **surprises** - and they’re not always **pleasant** ones either. But our **God** is a **sure thing**. He doesn’t keep any **tricks** up His sleeve, but rather, He’s always **honest** and **faithful** in dealing with us. Isaiah compares God’s faithfulness with the **soil** of the earth. He says, “*As the earth produces its growth, and as a garden causes what has been sown to sprout up, so God the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up in the presence of all the nations.*”

Isn't it interesting that Isaiah chose the one portion of the growth process which doesn't **change**, to compare with our unchangeable **God**? There may be many factors which will **prevent** a seed from sprouting - things like faulty **seed**, or a lack of **sunshine**, or a lack of (or overabundance of) **rain**; or even an overabundance of **weeds** due to a lack of **care**. But the soil itself does **not fail** to do its part. Likewise, our **God** is continually **faithful**. He has **proven** His faithfulness over and over again in **carrying out** His promises. And that includes the promise of **Advent** - the promise that He would send His own dear **Son** into the world, to **redeem** all mankind from their lost condition.

We currently have numerous reasons to **Rejoice Greatly In The LORD**. So, let's **rejoice** gladly and willingly. Let's **rejoice to rejoice** as Isaiah did, because we too have received **Jesus Christ** as our perfect robe of **righteousness** - a beautiful and certain **salvation** which will not fade away. And in addition, God faithfully continues to sow His **Word** among us, so that righteousness and praise will continue **to spring up** and **grow** among all the nations. May we **use** that Word of God as **faithfully** as God sends it, and thus be truly fruitful laborers in His vineyard. Amen.