

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

www.meetingwithchrist.com

EVEN SOLOMON WAS NOT DRESSED LIKE ONE OF THESE

Matthew 6:28-30

There is a section in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus talks about our worries. In Matthew 6, the Lord tells us not to worry about our life (v. 25). Do not worry about clothing (v. 28). Do not worry about food (v. 31). In fact, do not worry about tomorrow (v. 34). And Jesus concludes this topic by saying that *tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Worrying about clothes

Today we will focus our attention on the verses where Jesus deals with our worries over our clothes. And interestingly, this will lead him to talk about flowers and king Solomon. Let's read this passage. Matthew 6:28-30.

Matthew 6.28. And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

In this passage, Jesus links our worry about clothes to 'the lilies of the field.' *You worry about clothes*, the Lord says, *See how the lilies of the field grow*. It is not important to determine precisely the kind of lilies Jesus was talking about. Botanical vocabulary in those days was not as elaborate as it is nowadays. Most probably, in popular language of the time, many of the common spring flowers were called 'lilies.'

It is more important, however, to notice that the whole emphasis of this passage is on the theme of 'clothing.' It begins with a question about clothes. *Why do you worry about clothes* (v. 28)? In the following verse, it talks about Solomon being 'dressed' like these flowers (v. 29). And in the last verse, the word 'cloth' appears twice (v. 30). So four times in three verses.

Jesus' reasoning

Here Jesus seems to be saying, 'Look at the lilies over there. They do not work. They do not spin. And yet, they are able to survive in the field. Not only do they survive, but they grow in such beauty because God clothes them. If God can cloth these flowers so beautifully, how much more will He cloth you!'

The expression 'how much more' is used in what is called a *qal wahomer* argument. *Qal wahomer* is a Hebrew term which means 'light and heavy.' According to this principle of logic, if something less important is true (the 'lighter' statement), then something more important (the 'heavier' statement) must be true also.

Let us examine the logic of the reasoning here in Matthew 6:

- a. God clothes the flowers (the less important).
- b. You, the disciples, are of much more value than the flowers (the more important).
- c. Therefore ('how much more') God will cloth you. He will certainly care for you.

If this is the line of reasoning of this passage, then Jesus' teaching is easy to understand. If God so wonderfully clothes what is so transitory, how much more true it must be that God will provide clothing for his beloved children. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not take into account v. 29. *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.* What do we do with the splendor of Solomon's clothing? How does it fit Jesus' statement? In fact, when you read commentaries on this passage, you will notice that little is said about v. 29. Commentators seem to have a hard time integrating Solomon into their explanations.

Yes, this understanding of Jesus' reasoning is correct, but it is incomplete. I would like to suggest that the Lord Jesus is saying more than that. What else could He say? Here is a more complete line of reasoning. Jesus is saying, 'If God clothes the lilies of the field with such beauty that even the clothes of king Solomon, with all his glory, could not match it, will He not provide for you?' The magnificence of Solomon and of his court had become proverbial with OT passages like 1Kings 3:13 where God said to Solomon, *And I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.* For the Jews, Solomon was the highest representative of earthly grandeur. And yet, he was surpassed by the common lilies of the field. Jesus said, 'When God clothes the flowers of the field, He made even Solomon's glory look dull by comparison.'

Intrinsic and extrinsic clothing

When we look at a flower, we have to recognize that there is something about a flower in terms of beauty that nothing can match. There is nothing we can do that would add to its beauty. What is of the lilies is lilies. It is alive and it is intrinsically beautiful. The life and the beauty of the flower come together. They define the plant. Here in v. 29, it talks about Solomon being dressed like one of these flowers. Solomon's clothing was magnificent but if you took off Solomon's cloth, then Solomon will look no different from any ordinary human being because his glorious clothing was added on to him. We can say that it was extrinsic to him.

So we have this reasoning. 'If God made the flowers so beautiful that even Solomon cannot in all his glory compete with, how much more will He cloth you.' What does this 'how much more' mean? If we say, 'He dresses the lilies. Surely, He will dress you,' we find no point of comparison with Solomon. More accurately, Jesus said, 'If God clothes the flowers to the glory of Solomon, how much more will He cloth you to a glory exceeding that of Solomon's.' Solomon was a king. He dressed himself in gold and silk. Does that mean that if God provided me with a silken garment with gold braided everywhere on it, I would be at the level of Solomon? Is this what Jesus is talking about? We seem to be comparing two different things: intrinsic beauty (the beauty of the flowers) and extrinsic beauty (the beauty of Solomon's clothing). If God clothed me with the beauty of Solomon's clothing, it would still be external to me. My beauty would not be the real thing. In a way, I would be like the bride on her wedding day. Much of her beauty comes from external factors: the cosmetics that she put on and the dress that she wore. The next day, when all that is gone, she just becomes an ordinary person.

Let's summarize. I repeated the same thing, in different ways, to make the following point. If this passage means 'because God clothes the flowers, He will surely cloth me,' then the reasoning is easy to follow and we can basically close the matter. But we cannot close it because this is not exactly what Jesus said. The Lord made a comparison between how God clothes the flowers and how Solomon is dressed. A more accurate reasoning of the passage is this: if God can cloth the flowers to a glory exceeding that of Solomon, then He will surely cloth me to a glory exceeding that of Solomon, since I am worth much more than the flowers. But here we have a problem. No matter what God clothes me with externally, I cannot exceed the glory of Solomon.

Spiritual clothing

You notice that I emphasize the word 'externally,' to cloth externally. Because Jesus is talking here about 'internal' clothing. Can God cloth me to a glory greater than that of Solomon's? Yes, He can. What does He have to do to cloth me to this greater glory? God has to cloth me with a glory that, unlike Solomon's clothing, is internal, and not external. It is not physical, but spiritual. If I have spiritual clothing, then I exceed the level of Solomon's splendor because his royal clothing was only physical. Now we begin to understand Jesus. In his statement, He was talking about spiritual clothing, not physical clothing.

This is not to deny that there is a physical aspect to Jesus' words. Yes, God will provide necessary clothing for his children. But we have to recognize that Jesus was not just talking about physical provision. He was saying, 'I will provide for you physically, certainly, but I will do much more than that. I will provide for you spiritual glory. And Solomon, even in all his royal robes, could not compare with that. I will give garments of spiritual glory. And when you put on those garments, people will see the glory of the Lord in you.'

Remember the Parable of the Wedding Feast. At the wedding, the king saw someone who was without the proper garment. He said to this person, 'My friend, what are you doing here? How did you come here without a wedding garment (Matthew 22:12)?' Because he did not have the right cloth, the man was thrown into the outer darkness. The garment reveals the identity of the person. Both in the OT and in the NT, the garment indicates who you are. A prophet cannot be a prophet with the prophet's mantle. A man cannot be a priest without priestly garment. The white garments have a special meaning in the book of Revelation. The elders, the heavenly multitude, the angels, all these are dressed in white and brilliant garments. They are garments of glory, garments of light. Without these garments, you do not belong to the heavenly kingdom, just like the man without wedding clothes could not participate in the wedding feast.

To continue on this subject of spiritual clothing, I would like to read to you the last words of Jesus in the gospel of Luke. There Jesus uses the word 'cloth' and apply it in a spiritual sense. Luke 24:49: *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.* Jesus was saying to his disciples, 'Don't leave the city until you are clothed with God's power. Then you can go. If you go before you are clothed by God, you will go out in your own filthy garments, in the garments of your self-righteousness, in the garments of your own wisdom.' What does 'clothed with power' mean? It is to be clothed with the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-5: *On one occasion, while He (Jesus) was eating with them (the disciples), He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were to wait in Jerusalem to be clothed with the Holy Spirit, with the power that comes from above.*

To be equipped with

Now let's look at the meaning of the word 'cloth' in greater detail. 'To be clothed with' means 'to be equipped with.' In order to protect you from the cold, you put on cloth. In this way, you are equipped to stand the cold. Your cloth is your 'equipment,' so to speak, to cope with a cold environment. The apostle Paul uses the idea of clothing in the context of warfare. The Christian is like a soldier who wears an armor to protect himself from the enemies. He is equipped with a protective gear designed for combat.

Romans 13:12. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

You first put aside the 'deeds of darkness.' You take off your old cloth, the bad conduct that you had before. Then you put on the armor of light. 'Light' in the Bible, means 'righteousness' or holiness.' In 1John 1.7, we read, ... *we walk in the light, as He is in the light.* This means, 'Walk in righteousness as Jesus himself is righteous.' In 2Corinthians 6.7, Paul specifically talks about the 'armor of righteousness.' *We commend ourselves as ministers of God ... by the armor of righteousness.* This 'armor of righteousness' is called 'armor of light' in Romans 13 because we are asked not to accomplish any deed of darkness. 'Put on righteousness like an armor because righteousness is what will protect you from the attacks of sin. Righteousness will be your defense.'

Notice that God provides the clothing, but we are to put it on. God expects that we will make the effort of wearing the armor of light. 'You put on the armor of light.' God will not put it on for us. There are Christians who seem to think that grace and effort are irreconcilable. When they speak about grace, they cannot talk about man's effort. When they speak about our effort, they cannot speak about grace. I do not think this is how the word of God presents it. God, in his grace, provides us with the garment of salvation. But He does not force us to wear it. We have to put on the garment. He provides us with the bread of life, but He does not force us to eat it. We have to show that we want the bread and that we desire to eat it.

This applies also to our passage in Matthew 6. Jesus used flowers as evidence of God's ability to cloth us. 'Why do you worry about clothes? God clothes the flowers of the field. He will do the same for you.' Does that mean that we can sit back on our chair and just wait for God to miraculously drop clothes on our lap? Of course not. God provides, but we still have to co-operate with his grace. In this case, it probably means that Jesus' promise does not spare us from the necessity to work to earn the money to pay for our clothes. Having faith does not mean that we should expect God to do everything for us.

Grace and the appropriation of that grace. We have to put these two things in balance. God has provided us with the armor of light. But that armor will give us no protection if we do not wear it. The availability of God's grace is never an issue. If there is a problem, it lies in the appropriation of that grace. God opens the doors of life to us. We have to strive to enter these doors.

To become

So to be 'clothed with the armor of light' is to be equipped with that armor. But that definition of clothing is not sufficient. Something is still missing. Because to be equipped may appear to be something extrinsic, something that is added externally to your body. To be clothed has the meaning of being equipped with, but never with the idea of something that is extrinsic or superficial. Listen to Job's statement in Job 29:14: *I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban.* Job was saying, 'In the same way that a garment covers the body and is worn all day long, I was continually just in the administration of my affairs.' 'Righteousness clothed me' means 'I was righteous. I was just.' It was not an outward shell that Job put on to show that he is up to the task. It

means that he was truly righteous. By the transforming power of God, God made him pure in heart. The righteousness that God gave him becomes intrinsically his. So to be 'clothed with' has this other meaning in the NT. It means 'to become.'

'To be clothed with' means 'to become.' And in the NT, it is often linked to righteousness. It is to become righteous. Let's read 1 Corinthians 15:53-54.

1 Corinthians 15:53. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

Notice the word 'put on.' *This perishable must put on the imperishable.* 'Put on the imperishable.' It has the meaning of 'being clothed with.' 'When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable.' When Paul says that the perishable puts on the imperishable, he means that the perishable is transformed into something imperishable. It becomes imperishable. It is not just covered by an outward shell of imperishability. The expression 'put on' means to be transformed by God's power into something completely different, something that the power of death cannot touch, something eternal, something holy.

Now we begin to see the point. To put on righteousness as an armor is not merely to be equipped with righteousness. It is to become righteous. It is to be transformed by God's power into a righteous being. Paul says it in those words in Ephesians 5:8: *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.* You are not just equipped with light. You actually become light. 'You are light in the Lord.' By putting on the armor of light, God actually transforms you into light.

Putting on Christ

The ultimate clothing is to put on Christ. This is what Paul asks us to do in Romans 13:14: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.* We put on the Lord Jesus, i.e. Jesus becomes our clothing. How do we put on the Lord Jesus? It is done through baptism. We read in Galatians 3:27, *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* 'When you were baptized, you have clothed yourself with Christ.' In this way, the character of Jesus is being reproduced in us. But this requires a constant action on our part. It does not just happen at baptism. When Paul says, *Put on the Lord Jesus*, in Romans 13:14, he is talking to Christians who have already put on Christ in baptism. This means that to put on Christ at baptism is not the end of the matter. We have to keep putting on Christ. In practical terms, we let Jesus take control of us at all time. We accept to put all our desires and our actions under his control. When we do our part, the qualities of Christ will begin to be seen in us.

So the Lord Jesus is saying in Matthew 6:29, 'If God so clothed the flowers of the field with such a glory that even the glory of Solomon is nothing compared to that, how much more will He cloth you with a glory that exceeds Solomon's glory at any time.' If you are clothed with Christ, what has Solomon's glory got to compare with the glory of the Son of God?

Think of putting on Christ as you put on new clothes. Imagine yourself putting on compassion like your shirt, kindness like your sweater, love like your pants, meekness like your socks... Think of these Christian virtues as beautiful clothing. When you put these nice pieces of clothing, how can Solomon with all his glory compare with your glory? He just cannot. Yours has an enduring quality and a spiritual beauty that cannot be compared. Even Solomon, in all his glory, was not clothed as beautifully as you when you have put on Christ.