

Grave Clothes

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When Peter and John heard that the body of Jesus was no longer in His grave, they immediately rushed to the opened tomb. Something about the way the abandoned grave clothes lay, with the face cloth that had been on Christ's head set aside by itself, convinced them that Christ had indeed arisen from death.¹

The Lord's body was not subject to physical limitations. If He could materialize in the closed room where the disciples were gathered together,² He didn't need the stone that sealed His grave rolled away to escape. The open tomb simply proclaimed His absence from it.³ The empty grave clothes may well have lain undisturbed, just as they had been wrapped about His body. Perhaps the deserted appearance of the empty linen sheath, still wrapped together with the spices,⁴ showed the disciples that Christ's resurrected body must have been raised right through the grave clothes, with the shroud remaining on His head. Neither grave robbers nor deceivers⁵ could have left such a valid testimony to the resurrection of Christ.

The contrasts between the resurrection of Christ and the raising of Lazarus are remarkable. The stone had to be removed from Lazarus's grave to let him out. He emerged from the grave bound hand and foot with grave clothes, with the head cloth still wrapped around his face. And the onlookers had to be directed to *Loose him, and let him go.*⁶

The resurrection of Christ is the prototype for the final resurrection of all Christians.⁷ Every true believer in Christ is promised a resurrection body like His glorious body.⁸ But we will not get it until He comes for us.⁹ The raising of Lazarus seems to be more analogous to the present state of born again Christians on this earth. Before we were saved, we were dead in trespasses and sins.¹⁰ When we put our trust in Christ, we were born again with imperishable seed.¹¹ God has made us alive with Christ, and raised us up with Him to sit together with Him in the heavenly places.¹² But our reborn spirits are obviously still housed in these old bodies that are subject to corruption.¹³

Sometimes it seems that everything we do is influenced by the morbid stench of our natural sinful condition.¹⁴ Like Lazarus, we still find ourselves terribly entangled in the grave clothes associated with our former attitudes and ways of life that the Scriptures call the "Flesh."¹⁵ As the Apostle Paul describes it, we seem to be practicing the evil that we hate instead of the good that we would like to do, until our anguished spirits cry, "*Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"¹⁶ And the Spirit of God within us answers with the Apostle, "*I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"¹⁷

Christian baptism symbolizes *That our old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*¹⁸ We identify our old selves as dead and buried with Christ by being submerged in the waters that represent His death. *But if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.*¹⁹ We emerge from the baptismal waters identified as new creatures in the resurrected Christ.²⁰ As risen with Christ, we are urged to seek the things which are above, where He sits at the right hand of God.²¹ The children of God²² are to consider their earthly bodies dead to sin,²³ and lay aside the grave clothes of sin that so easily entangles them²⁴ to walk in newness of life²⁵.

The Apostle Paul was certainly not content to remain enslaved to sin. He had gladly sacrificed everything for the righteousness of God based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted to know more of Christ and the power of His resurrection.²⁶ Christ had emptied himself of everything His own will could have demanded, and become obedient to will of God, though it meant death on the cross.²⁷ Paul was willing to be conformed to His death in order to attain to the spiritual perfection of the resurrection state.²⁸ He strove to crucify his own natural desires that were contrary to the will of God and walk in the Spirit.²⁹ And the more he embraced the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ in this way, the more he experienced the delivering power of His resurrection.³⁰

Paul was not unrealistic. He knew that he had not arrived at the sinless perfection of the final resurrection state yet.³¹ But although he would never fully attain it in this life, he wanted to lay hold on as much of what Christ had in store for him as he possibly could while still on earth. He pressed relentlessly towards the goal of living in the perfection of God's upward call to resurrection now. And the Scriptures urge us to have the same attitude.

As Christians, we have the ability to *Put off, concerning our former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*³² By reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God³³ as each temptation assails us, we allow the Lord to strip away the grave clothes that still encumber us, bit by bit. And as our consciences become more sensitive by reason of use,³⁴ God will reveal our remaining inappropriate attitudes to us³⁵ so they can also be dealt with according to His will. Grave clothes are not becoming to the children of God. We were not saved to spend our lives stumbling around in them!

(All quotations from the NKJV)

References:

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|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) John 20:1-8 | 12) Ephesians 2:4-6 | 24) Hebrews 12:1-2 |
| 2) John 20:19 & Luke 24:37 | 13) Romans 8:10 | 25) Romans 6:4 |
| 3) Luke 24:5-7 | 14) Ephesians 2:3 | 26) Philippians 3:4-10 |
| 4) John 19:39-40 | 15) Galatians 5:17-21 | 27) Philippians 2:6-8 |
| 5) Matthew 28:12-14 | 16) Romans 7:14-24 | 28) Philippians 3:10-11 |
| 6) John 11:38-44 | 17) Romans 7:25 | 29) Galatians 5:24 |
| 7) 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 | 18) Romans 6:6 | 30) 1 Peter 4:1-2 |
| 8) Philippians 3: 20-21 | 19) Romans 6:5 | 31) Philippians 3:12-14 |
| 9) 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 | 20) 2 Corinthians 5:17 | 32) Ephesians 4:22-24 |
| 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 | 21) Colossians 3:1-3 | 33) Romans 6:11-14 |
| 10) Ephesians 2:1 | 22) Romans 8:13-17 | 34) Hebrews 5:14 |
| 11) 1 Peter 1:23 | 23) Colossians 3:5 | 35) Philippians 3:15 |
