

CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

A Devotional Meditation on Tetzaveh (You Shall Command)

Exodus 27:20-30:10; Ezekiel 43:10-27;
Matthew 22:1-14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

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A month after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I was called back to active duty with the U.S. Army. I had transferred to the Army Reserve at the end of the Cold War, along with many others whose service was no longer required in the active ranks. We never ceased being soldiers, but the reduced needs of our nation's defense caused us to adjust our daily lives to other priorities. For me, that meant returning to graduate school, and eventually finding employment as a civilian in the Department of Defense. However, my warrior's heart would not let me release my childhood dream of being a soldier, even if it were only part time.

I was overjoyed when the nation again required my service, as my wife can tell you. She noticed an immediate change when I put on my new uniform. I carried myself with greater confidence, indicating not only that I had returned to my original calling, but that I understood the gravity of that calling. For me, *soldier* was not just a job title, but an identity that embodied honor, integrity, and selfless service. Those qualities had become part of my character as I learned the godly values of my Christian family. Putting on the uniform did not impart those qualities to me, but confirmed what had already been imparted. The uniform reminded me of those qualities and how to draw on them to live out my calling as an expression of my identity.

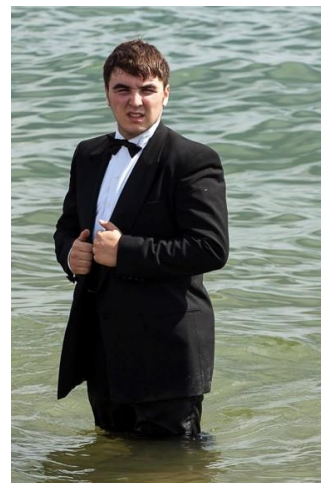
This is a lesson our Redeemer has been teaching us from the beginning. It doesn't come naturally, which is why He has taken such a long time to prepare the special people for Himself that He has called out of all nations. Paul writes about that:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, training us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live in a manner that is self-controlled and righteous and godly in the present age. We wait for the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah *Yeshua*. He gave Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and so that He might purify for Himself a chosen people, zealous for good deeds.

Titus 2:11-14 TLV

When we remember that our Messiah is the Son of David and King of Israel, then we understand why the Apostles use language like this to link *Yeshua's* followers from all nations to the Covenant Nation of Israel. They are referring to what God told Moses when He brought the Hebrews out of Egypt:

Moses went up to God, and *ADONAI* called to him from the mountain saying, "Say this to the house of Jacob, and tell *Bnei-Yisrael* [the Children of Israel], 'You have



Do clothes reflect character, or does character influence clothing choice? Photo: Dave Bledsoe, August 17, 2014, via Flickr.

seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you listen closely to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you will be My own treasure from among all people, for all the earth is Mine. So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of *kohanim* [priests] and a holy nation.' These are the words which you are to speak to *Bnei-Yisrael*."

Exodus 19:3-6 TLV

The problem is that we're not all that interested in becoming a holy nation or a kingdom of priests. Such a prospect infringes on our natural inclination to do whatever pleases us. That's why we have always tended to dodge the calling of our God, and continue to take shortcuts and easier choices even after we answer His call. Even though all are called, our Redeemer's most intensive work is with the willing. That's one way to view the Elect: many are called, but few are chosen, as Yeshua says. Could it be that few are chosen because only a few are willing to take on that identity of being separated to God as His special possession?

Yeshua mentioned the few who are chosen in the context of a parable about special clothing. It's the parable of a king who had a wedding feast, but when the invited guests proved too busy with their own lives to attend, he brought in whomever would answer the invitation. The parable ends like this:

But when the king came in to look over the guests, he saw a man there who wasn't dressed in wedding clothes. "Friend," he said to him, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" But the man was silent. Then the king said to his servants, "Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen.

Matthew 22:11-14 TLV

What is so important about wedding clothes? We have to ask that in this age of comfort and casual dress. It's still inappropriate in Western culture to show up at a special occasion like a wedding wearing a t-shirt, shorts, and sandals. Other cultures have similar expectations for special occasions. Failure to dress appropriately indicates a lack of respect for the people to be honored, for those who have given the invitation, and for the very nature of the event itself. If it's a wedding, then slovenly dress might reveal an attitude that questions the value of a man and woman joining in a holy covenant relationship exclusive to one another.

That's the kind of relationship our Creator intended with us human beings from the beginning. We are created, called, and chosen to be His intimate partners in the continued expression of Himself in His universe. When our first ancestors demonstrated our preference to use His blessings for our own desires rather than His, He proceeded to work through time and history to demonstrate why it is in our best interests to answer His invitation, and to work with Him in making ourselves ready to walk into such an honored and weighty role. In time, He established a nation and a people to model this calling for all nations. All of them eagerly accepted His invitation, but when they read the fine print (or, more accurately, He read it to them), they decided it was too scary and too difficult. That's when the Creator gave detailed instructions about a special class of people who would demonstrate His calling to the chosen people of Israel, teaching them the difference

between the holy and the common. Even their clothes would set them apart, as God told Moses:

Bring your brother Aaron near with his sons from among *Bnei-Yisrael*, so that they may minister to Me as *kohanim* [priests]—Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. You are to make holy garments for your brother Aaron, for splendor and for beauty. You are to speak to all who are skilled, whom I have filled with a spirit of artistry, to make Aaron's garments for consecrating him, so that he may minister to Me as a *kohen*. These are the garments that they are to make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash. They are to make holy garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so that he may minister to Me as a *kohen*.

Exodus 28:1-4 TLV

These priestly garments were stunning in their beauty, but they could be deadly. Those who tried to appropriate them without proper authority suffered severe consequences. Even those who were called had to be careful to live in a manner that God considered worthy of their calling. The clothes reminded them and the people of that calling and that identity. It's the same calling and identity now extended to all people who answer the invitation to join with the Messiah of Israel and become part of His chosen people. One day we will wear our priestly garments in the way He intended all along. Until then, we do our best to internalize the qualities of holiness and righteousness He has imparted to us, drawing on them to live out our calling as an expression of our redeemed identity.