

Conference Devotional 1983

by Jim Flanigan

Jim Flanigan's sermon reflects on the last moments of Jesus' earthly life, emphasizing the significance of His final garments, gifts, and the hope of resurrection.

Duration: 19:49

Topics: "Eternal Hope", "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the last moments of Jesus' life and the significance of his death and resurrection. He emphasizes the love and anticipation that believers have for Jesus, even though they have never seen him. The speaker also highlights the importance of living in the light of the hope of seeing Jesus face to face. He mentions the shepherds, Mary, and Joseph as examples of those who had the privilege of seeing God incarnate, and he encourages the audience to live in a way that they too may have the first glimpse of Jesus before the end of their lives.

Transcript

Just a little reading, please, from the Gospel by Matthew, again, and from chapter 27. The Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 27. I'm reading at verse 57.

Matthew 27, verse 57. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple. He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus.

Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. And I'm thinking particularly of a linen cloth, a new tomb, and a great stone. And the Lord will bless the reading of his word.

There is a very sad little expression in the previous chapter, which says of Peter that he stood with them to see the end. The end. We know, of course, that it was not really the end.

And yet, in some respects it was. It was the end of a chapter. It was the end of an era.

It was the end of thirty-three unique and wonderful years, the like of which men have never seen before, and which will never be lived again. And I know, of course, that the Saviour is alive, and in the power of an

endless life he is alive. But he is not alive in flesh and blood like they had known him for thirty-three years.

It was the end of a unique life. And Peter sat to see the end. I want to just gather our thoughts in quietness for a moment or two around three of these last things that were associated with the end.

There was a linen cloth. It was his last garment that ever he wore on earth. There was a new tomb.

It was the last gift ever given to him. And there was a great stone, and I want to associate it with the last glimpse that men had of him. The last garment, the last gift, and the last glimpse.

When I thought of the last garment, I thought of the first one, swaddling clothes. Will you say, of course, those were not exactly the first garments that he wore? Not as a person, but in flesh and blood they were his first garment. Way back in the Psalms, in Psalm 104, we read that he was clothed with light as with a garment.

He was covered, clothed with honor and majesty. And that agrees with another scripture which says that he dwelt in light unapproachable. They were the garments of deity.

But he left that glory, never parted with any of it, but somehow covered it and chose to cover it with swaddling clothes. The garments of light that had been the garments in eternity are exchanged for the swaddling bands of real humanity. And our Lord Jesus comes into infancy and wears his first garment.

We can't understand it. I don't think you should worry about that. A young brother came to me recently after a meeting.

He said, I don't understand it. He said, you say that worlds were dependent upon him while he was dependent upon Mary. I said, that's what I said.

He said, you said that it was the God of creation come into time, the God of eternity coming into time. I said, I said that. He said, you said that this is the God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

And now he has come down voluntarily to be confined in a manger and to be wrapped in swaddling clothes. He said, I don't understand that. I said, neither do I. But we bow at the wonder of it.

And I said to this young brother, I should rather worry if you discover one day that you have a gospel and a Savior and a God that you can fully understand. Then you have something to worry about. If a God can be embraced by my tiny little mind, if my little intelligence can fully comprehend him, then I have something to worry about.

But while we bow at the manger and don't understand it, yet we adore and we worship as we see him wearing the first garment, the swaddling clothes. He wore another garment. He wore a seamless robe.

The soldier said of it, let us not rend it. And if here is a garment of real and true humanity at the manger, it seems to me that in a symbolic way we have a garment of mystery in the seamless robe. We have one who is God and man at the same time.

Two glorious things in one personality. Indivisibly they are there. Inscrutably Godhood and manhood, deity and real humanity together in one personality.

And again we cannot understand. But he did wear a seamless robe. On that last evening he wore another garment.

He wore a slave's apron. He wore a towel about him. Girded his loins with a towel.

While men sat and argued as to which of them was the greatest, then the Lord Jesus demonstrated who was the greatest. And he took the towel and he girded himself. It was another garment.

A slave's garment. Had they been guests in another man's home? Well of course there would have been a slave to have attended to the courtesy of the washing of the feet of the guests. But these men were not guests in another man's home.

They were a little company of friends who had borrowed the room for the evening. And therefore it fell to some of them to refresh the feet of the others. But they argued and disputed.

And while they argued, he who had worn the garments of light, who had exchanged them for the swaddling clothes, and who had worn the seamless robe, he lays aside his outer garments and he wraps himself in the slave's apron. It was only hours later that he wore another garment. It was a purple robe.

A garment of mockery, of shame. And he wore that. And when finally they took him out of the city and across the highway and over to the hill to Golgotha, it would seem, if I read it right, that they stripped him of every garment and that he hung naked upon the tree.

Late that afternoon there comes the man who, in my judgment, is the most privileged man in the New Testament. Joseph of Arimathea comes and with the help of Nicodemus they take the body down. Of the old man Simeon at the beginning, it says, he took him up.

But of Joseph at the end, it says, he took him down. Gently they took him down, unfixed his hands and feet, took from his head the thorny crown and brought forth a winding sheet, covered the body, carried him gently around the corner, only but a few yards to the tomb and wrapped him in linen cloth, his last garment, a clean linen cloth. They let him in a new tomb.

It was Joseph's tomb. Joseph gave it. He gave it quietly because Joseph of Arimathea never speaks a word.

He gave it willingly. I don't know that he ever expected it back again. Did he have any idea that there would be a resurrection? Did he not ungrudgingly, willingly, freely give this tomb as a gift with nothing in mind of receiving it back again? But three days later, he got his gift back.

It was but a lone return with interest. As I thought of the last gift, I thought of the first gift. Wise men came.

They crossed deserts. They crossed rivers. They came to the capital city of the king, looking for the king.

Where is he, they said. And when eventually they found him, wherever they found him, they presented unto him gifts. They gave him gold.

They gave him frankincense. They gave him myrrh. And perhaps were unaware of the symbolic nature of the gifts that they were giving.

Perhaps unaware that here was the very divine person incarnate that the gold would speak about. That here in this tender child was the beginnings of a life that would be characterized by moral glory. A life that, like frankincense, would ascend sweetly, constantly, into the presence of God and delight the heart of God.

Perhaps they were not aware, but it was the beginning of a unique life. They gave him myrrh. This strange thing with a bitter sweetness, with a sweet bitterness, that seemed to characterize or to symbolize the sufferings that would be his at the end, thirty-three years later.

It was the first gift. And during his lifetime, he received other gifts. Certain women ministered to him, gave him of their substance.

There were many who gave him shelter, who opened doors, who made him welcome. We think of the little company at Bethany. And they made room for him when others had no room.

And they gave him cheer and refreshment when others had no time for him. They gave, they gave. How much our blessed Lord must have appreciated that.

And others, like a family at Bethany, who gave freely of their substance. But now, the last gift. A tomb.

A sepulcher. Just outside the city. Shewn out of the very rock of Moriah, of Golgotha.

Joseph gave it. It was accepted as a loan. And the interest that came with the return of the loan is this.

That Joseph's name is enshrined forever in the story of Christ and his sufferings. It's a kind of a principle, isn't it? That we lose what on ourselves we spend. But we have as treasure, without end, whatever Lord to Thee we lend, who giveth us all.

Perhaps when we get home, we may well learn that Joseph never used his tomb again. It was given. But returned with interest, a tomb fragrant with memories of Christ.

When they took the body down, they would bathe the body, bathe the wounds. They would anoint the body with the spices and swathe the body in bandages, the linen cloth. Having wrapped him and laid him down, I imagine these two men slowly, carefully, gently, rolling the stone.

It wasn't a boulder. It was a great stone wheel. It rolled in a channel.

And I can picture them rolling it until the mouth of the sepulcher is almost closed. Then I picture that through the remaining gap they would have a last glimpse of him. Then, the stone rolled right across and the world has never seen him since.

You say, men saw him. Indeed they did, but not worldlings. His own, they saw him.

Disciples saw him. The world has not seen him since. It was the last glimpse when they rolled the stone across.

I can well imagine that they did it all without a word. I find it hard to believe that they did it without a tear and they had a last glimpse of him. Now you see the miracle that has been wrought.

We love a Savior whom we have never seen. We love one upon whose face we have not yet been privileged to look. But we wait for him.

And when he comes, one of the thrilling things about that moment would be this. They shall see his face. I think of the first glimpse.

The shepherds, Mary, Joseph, standing there in an outbuilding in Bethlehem looking at God incarnate. Here is the last glimpse as they close the stone across the door. We wait for our first glimpse.

And one day, someday, maybe this day, we shall see him for the first time. Oh, the joy of that moment when we shall see him. My mother died when she was very young and I was very young too.

She was but 39 and I was 11. For a long time afterwards, people constantly would stop me and they would say, You're so-and-so. I knew your mother.

And I would always ask the same question, What do you remember about my mother? And I would hear various little bits and pieces. But one day a lady stopped me and it was the same conversation. I said, What do you remember about my mother? Oh, she said, I remember going across to see her just two days before she died.

She said, When I saw her, I was rather embarrassed. She looked so ill and in great pain and wasted away and not the person that I had known. She said, I felt awkward and clumsy and didn't know what to say.

I said, What did you say? She said, I just said, You're suffering a great deal. She said, I'll never forget her reply. She said, She just looked back sweetly and simply from the bed and said, Just one glimpse of him in glory will the toils of life repay.

May the Lord help us so to live in the light of this sight that we might have that first glimpse before the day is at. The last garment. The last gift.

The last glimpse. The end. In some senses.

In another sense. But the beginning. And we wait for Him.

The Lord bless you.

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