**Threads of Hope Sewing Devotion 22**

Over the past months, we’ve looked a lot at what people wore in Bible times and at some of the fabrics that were available at the time, specifically leather, wool, flax and linen. I think we often have an idea of people in Bible times being somewhat disheveled, ragged, maybe dingy, in their clothing choices. There certainly were poor-er people that would have looked like that, just as there are today. But we shouldn’t assume that people walked around with ripped or unhemmed garments, or in unstructured rags. By Jesus’s day especially, garments were crafted.

Of course, there are no photographs that would show what Bible people wore but we do have evidence of what would have been worn by wealthy people of the era. When King Tut’s tomb was unearthed, more than 50 items of clothing, including beading garments, tunics, gloves, scarves, sandals and headdresses were found inside. The articles were made of leather, linen and papyrus. Unfortunately, exposure to the air and handling caused them to disintegrate. The finding of decorative sandals with a reed sole may be consistent with the prophet Isaiah’s complaint in chapter 3, verse16 of his book when he says “the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk . . . mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet” referring to bells on their sandals.

Later time periods, such as the Greek and Roman eras, yield statues and murals to give us ideas of what rich and poor alike would have worn. Jewish people would most likely have copied the fashions of the day. Clothes would have let rich people show off their wealth. All of the ancient cultures of the Bible—Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Jewish—imported and exported goods so they would have had access to luxury clothing items.

Some of those luxurious fashions of the rich would have included multiple sets of clothing—clothes for work and clothes for leisure as well as clothes for winter and clothes for summer. Rich people also had clothes made from different fabrics since they would have access to different materials. Poorer people would have worn simpler garments from plainer fabrics, more earth tones. The rich would have been able to afford fabrics that had been dyed in various colors. We’ve looked before at how textiles were dyed purple with a dye extracted from the Murex snail. That coloring was used in the building of the Tabernacle and by New Testament times it was said that wool dyed purple in this method was 40 times more expensive than any other color. You may remember that the Bible character Lydia, a Christian believer who opened her home to the early church, was a “seller of purple”. You can read about her in Acts chapter 16. She most likely was a hard-working, knowledgeable and possibly rich woman.

Embroidery was another way of showing wealth by what you wore. Embroidery would have required the funds to purchase the cloth and the thread as well as to hire someone to do the work. The Bible mentions many times the profession of an embroiderer in both furnishings and clothing. The Greek culture was especially associated with embroidered clothing so it would make sense that this fashion would have carried over to the Jewish culture of the time as well.

Of course, women would be the most concerned with fashion and showing off their wealth through what they wore. The Apostle Paul gives the women of his day specific warnings about avoiding this trap when he writes to Timothy and gives this instruction in I Timothy 2:9-10:

*I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

Peter echoes this thought in I Peter 3:3-4:

*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.*

These apostles aren’t telling women not to look nice or not to dress up. They are telling us not to be fooled into thinking that true beauty comes from what the price tag says on the outfit we have on, how much our jewelry costs or where we get our hair done. But we need to be more concerned that our actions reflect kindness, goodness and righteousness. When people look at us, they aren’t so busy noticing our clothes, our jewelry or our fancy hairdo because they are really seeing that we look like Jesus.

There are several stories in Scripture that specifically mention people wearing richly ornamented robes. In the Old Testament, the boy Joseph is given what is commonly known as a coat of many colors by his father Jacob. Different versions of the Bible refer to Joseph’s garment as a “coat, a robe, or a tunic” and also that it is “richly ornamented, elaborately embroidered and ornate.” We do know that such a garment would signify that the wearer was not doing ordinary work while wearing such a robe so we can imagine the animosity it caused between Joseph and his brothers in a family that was already fractured. This robe plays a pivotal part in the story of this dysfunctional family but God takes what is meant for evil—when Joseph’s brothers sell him as a slave--and uses it for good to save the whole of Israel from starvation.

In the New Testament, we have another robe in the story of the Prodigal Son. After squandering his inheritance on wild living, the Prodigal comes back to his father, begging to be given the position of a servant in the household. But his father is overjoyed at the return of his son, and runs out to meet him, restoring him to his position in the family. One of the ways the father demonstrates this is by clothing the son in the best ceremonial robe that can be found in the house as well as sandals and a ring.

There is another story in the Scripture of someone wearing a purple robe. The wearer of this robe has the ultimate right to wear a robe that signifies power, wealth and royalty. But when the robe was put on him, those in attendance did not intend to honor the wearer but to mock him. Here is what John 19 tells us about this robe:

 *The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face. Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”*

Three robes, three stories. In the story of Joseph’s robe, the love of a father toward his son. In the story of the Prodigal’s robe, the forgiveness of a father for his son. In the story of Christ’s robe, the ultimate story of love and forgiveness—Jesus taking the punishment that should have been yours and mine.

There is one last robe to talk about today. It’s not an actual robe but a symbolic robe. It’s the robe we can wear if we come to Jesus with a repentant heart and ask Him to forgive our sins. Isaiah 61:10 says,

 *For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness*

Jesus endured the robe of shame, the robe of mocking, dying on the cross to give me the Robe of His Righteousness. I don’t deserve it. He bought it for me out of His love. It fits perfectly and never goes out of fashion.

This month as you sew, think about those robes in Scripture. Joseph’s robe—a coat of many colors to show a father’s love. The Prodigal’s robe—a sign of forgiveness and reinstatement into the family. Christ’s robe—a purple robe, meant to mock but through His blood, becoming my robe of righteousness. May the work of our hands, through the shorts, skirts and dresses we sew, send this Gospel story to boys and girls around the world.