

# In the Loom<sup>1</sup> of Heaven



## SABBATH—MARCH 26

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Isaiah 64; Romans 4:1–7; Romans 3:21–31; Romans 6:1–13; Philippians 3:3–16.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven. Blessed are those whose sins are taken away’ ” (Romans 4:7, NIV).

**“CHRIST DIED IN THE SINNER’S PLACE AND PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR SINS.** He has obeyed the law in the sinner’s place. He has done this so that the sinner may believe in Him and grow up into Him to the full measure of a person in Christ Jesus. In this way the sinner may become complete in Him. Christ has made payment for sin. And Christ has accepted all of sin’s terrible results and punishment. But while accepting the burden (weight of sin), Jesus has brought in everlasting righteousness (goodness), so that the believer is sinless in God’s eyes. The time comes when the question will be asked, ‘If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them?’ (Romans 8:33, CEV). And the answer is, ‘It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again’ (Romans 8:34, KJV). Jesus has the spotless robe of righteousness, woven in the loom of heaven. There is no thread in it woven by sinful human beings [people]. Jesus is at the right hand of God, to clothe His believing children in the perfect garment [robe] of His righteousness. Those who are saved in the kingdom of God will have nothing to boast about themselves. The praise and the glory will all flow back to God, the giver of salvation.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, December 6, 1894. Notice the symbol (word-picture): a robe of righteousness, a spotless robe of righteousness, “woven in the loom of heaven.” What a wonderful picture of the righteousness of Jesus. It is the righteousness that covers everyone who will be saved into His kingdom at last.

1. loom—a frame or machine that is used to weave threads or yarns to produce cloth.

**SUNDAY—MARCH 27****STARING IN THE MIRROR  
(Isaiah 64)**

Not all Christians have lived up to the high standards that their faith asks them to. Some do better than others. But we all fall short. What Christian stares in a mirror and sees Jesus staring back? No matter how faithful, what Christian can claim any kind of righteousness for himself or for herself? What Christian is not upset by what he or she knows hides under the surface?

**What message is being proclaimed in Isaiah 64? How is the garment being used to describe human righteousness? What does the garment mean? What hope is given in the chapter too?**

The phrase “filthy [dirty] rags” means a garment (cloth) that has been made dirty from a woman’s monthly period. What more powerful picture could the Bible give of human sin after the Fall? The apostle (teacher) Paul picks up on this theme (idea) in Romans 3. Paul makes it clear that both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) are in the same position in God’s eyes. They are all sinners in need of God’s grace.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 64 also makes this point. It points out our problem as sinners, but it also points out the reason for our hope.

2. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He gives us to take away our sins.

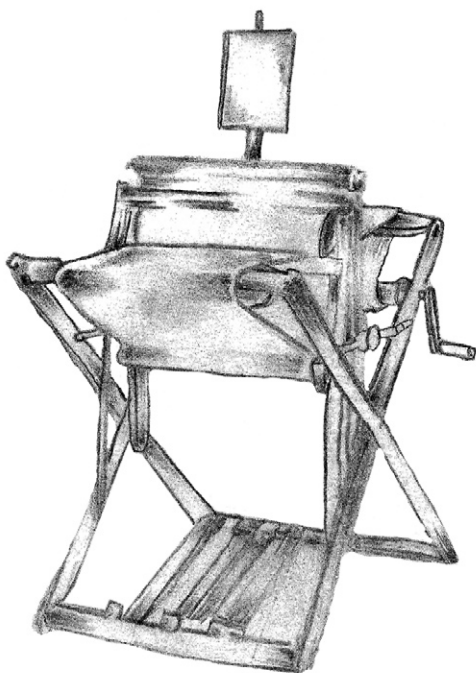
3. imputed—receiving credit for something another person has done.

When was the last time you took a deep look at yourself with all your secret thoughts and desires? What did you see? How scary was it? What is your only hope, and why?

**MONDAY—MARCH 28****IMPUTED<sup>3</sup> RIGHTEOUSNESS  
(Romans 4:1–7)**

If you compare your goodness to God’s goodness, what do you find? If you are honest, the difference will be pretty scary. There is not much goodness in our hearts that would win God’s approval or favor. Is there? In fact, there is nothing at all, nothing but “filthy [dirty] rags.”

What hope do we have then? A great hope, really! The words for that hope are *imputed righteousness*. What do they mean? That is very simple. *Imputed righteousness* is the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness that was “woven in the loom of heaven” and given to us by faith. “Imputed righteousness” means Jesus’ sinless life is substituted (exchanged) for our *sinful* life. It is credited (given) outright to us. And it covers us completely. To God, it is the same as if we had never sinned. It is the same as if we had always been completely obedient to God’s commands. It is the same as if we were as holy and righteous as Jesus Himself.



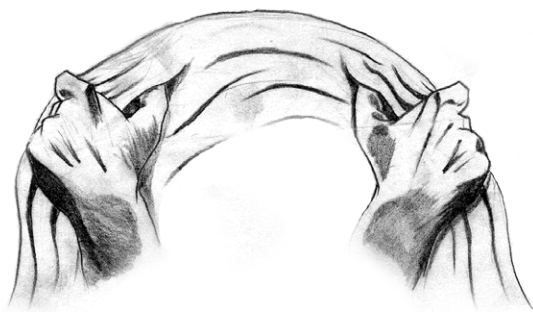
The perfect righteousness of Jesus was woven in the loom of heaven.

**According to Romans 4:1–7, how does Abraham’s trust in God show imputed righteousness?**

Paul says in Romans 4:2 that if Abraham were justified (made holy) by works, he could have boasted. But Abraham believes God, and God judges him as righteous. Jesus invites us as sinners to come to Him in simple belief. Then He will give us His robe of perfection, the perfect righteousness that Jesus gained in His life on earth. That is called “imputed righteousness.” And this is the only answer to the problem so well described in Isaiah 64 and Romans 3.

Imagine it like this: Jesus takes

away your old dirty clothes, your filthy rags. Then He wraps you in the robe of His perfect righteousness, His perfect holiness, His perfect record of law-keeping. He wraps you in it and then whispers in your ear, “Now, you are perfect. I have given you My perfection. Please wear this robe. And do not let it slip away from you.”



Jesus takes away your old, filthy rags and wraps you in His robe of perfection.

What is the greatest gift anyone ever gave you? How did the gift make you feel, even if you did not do anything to deserve it? How much more thankful should we be for the gift of righteousness that Jesus offers us?

**TUESDAY—MARCH 29**

**WITHOUT THE LAW  
(Romans 3:21–31)**

A pastor stood before his church group and said, “Jesus Christ has changed my life. I am a new and very different person than I was before.

“I have been a Christian for 25 years. And there is one truth that my

experience has taught me. It is this: suppose that I am to be saved in the end. Suppose that I do really ‘continue until the end,’ as Jesus said. Suppose that I make it into God’s eternal [forever; without end] kingdom. Then there is no doubt in my mind that it will be only because I am covered in the robe of Christ’s righteousness. This is a righteousness that is woven in the loom of heaven and that covers me completely. I can overcome sin. Through the grace of God I have had many victories. I can overcome weaknesses in my character,<sup>4</sup> and through the grace of God I have. I can learn to love all kinds of people, even my enemies, and through the grace of God I am learning to.

“All that being said, I know that none of that is anywhere near good enough. Suppose that I am not covered by the righteousness of Jesus, credited [offered] to me by faith, separate from my obedience to the law. Then at the end of the 1,000 years,<sup>5</sup> you can stand on the wall of the Holy City and wave down to me. This is because I know I will not be there with you. I cannot be there with you.”

**What is Paul saying in Romans 3:21–31? How do the ideas in these verses reflect (show) what the pastor above said?**

Paul was explaining to a certain group about a specific issue. But his point is for everyone, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). And it is just as important for us today, as Seventh-day Adventists who believe that the law is still binding, meaning we still must obey it. But it is God’s righteousness that saves us. As sinners, we need God’s righteousness to cover us like a garment (robe). It is the righteousness of Jesus’ perfect life that saves us. Our redemption<sup>6</sup> is in Him. It is found in Him, not in ourselves or in our law-keeping. And we get this redemption by faith.



**Keeping the law does not save us; only Jesus can.**

**What has been your experience with law-keeping? Have you ever sensed that your best efforts at obedience were making**

4. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; someone’s personality.

5. 1,000 years—a span of time that lasts 1,000 years. After Jesus returns at the Second Coming, the redeemed (saved) will live and reign with Christ in heaven for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:6), a period of time also known as the millennium. During that time, Satan cannot leave earth (Revelation 20:1–3), and the redeemed will sit with God in judgment (Revelation 20:4, 5).

6. redemption—salvation; Jesus brought us back from the penalty of death and offered to us the gift of eternal life through His sacrifice (death) in our place on the cross.

**you right before God? What does your answer suggest? Bring your response to class on Sabbath and defend your position.**

### WEDNESDAY—MARCH 30

#### CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN<sup>7</sup> (Romans 6:1–13)

An author wrote a short story about two small-time (not-so-famous) crooks trying to plan a robbery. In the plan, one of the crooks was to dress up in a policeman's uniform and stand in front of the place to be robbed. That way no one would be suspicious that his partner would be making a robbery inside the place. But the story ends with the crook acting as a policeman, arresting his partner. Dressed as a cop, he starts to act like one!

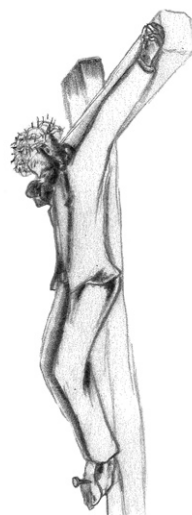
This story makes a strong point connected with our topic. Yes, by faith we are covered in the righteousness of Christ. In other words, it is His "robe of righteousness." We now are born again and have a new life in Christ. There is no question, then, that our lives will reflect (show) the garment (robe) that we wear.

In receiving Christ's robe of righteousness, we have made a 100 percent promise to let Him put His character into our lives. We completely are justified (forgiven and made pure) by grace. It is the work of a moment. We also have been given the power to obey. This power is taken into our heart and changes us over time. In this sense, it

is the work of a lifetime. Why would we ask for more? "I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13, NIV). Certainly that means the power to obey His law.

**What does Romans 6:1–13 say about the kind of life we are to live when we are covered, or "clothed," by the righteousness of Jesus?**

Paul is very clear about the great, life-change that will happen to someone who has "been crucified [put to death]" with Jesus. Notice the life-and-death symbol here. There is nothing halfway. Our old person, the person in those filthy rags, has died. A new person is born, one clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Now we can "walk in the newness of life." This newness means that we can no longer let sin control us. We have been given many promises of victory. But the question is, will we claim them for ourselves?



**We must be crucified (put to death) with Christ.**

<sup>7</sup> clothes make the man—an idiom (phrase) meaning that the right kind of clothes makes a person not only look better but become better.

**What parts of your life show how real your experience is with God? In what areas are you struggling? How can you daily choose to die to self and live the new life in Christ that is offered to each one of us?**

### **THURSDAY—MARCH 31**

#### **CHEAP GRACE<sup>8</sup> AND LEGALISM<sup>9</sup> (Philippians 3:3–16)**

All through the Bible, the writers point to the need for obedience. To think that the law is not important because Christ lives in our hearts is a mistake. If Christ truly lives in our hearts, good actions must follow. At the same time, it is a deadly mistake to think we can be saved by our own works of obedience.

Paul wrote a long list of his life's qualifications and successes before he met Jesus. For example, he was circumcised<sup>10</sup> on the eighth day. He was a Pharisee.<sup>11</sup> He worked hard. And he said he was faultless (perfect). Talk about legalism. After Paul accepted Christ, he called these things garbage compared to knowing Christ. Paul gained righteousness by accepting the robe of Christ's righteousness. And he wanted to become like Jesus.

**How does Paul explain in Philippians 3:3–6 the great truth of salvation by faith and what it means in the life of the one who is saved?**

We must remember the difference between the imputed righteousness of Christ (the righteousness that cleanses us from sin and forgives us) and the work that the Holy Spirit does in us to change us. We never must separate them. As Christians we must have both. To have the first without the second is like having a coin with only one side. It does not work at all!

The understanding that obedience comes as a gift keeps us out of two ditches: cheap grace and legalism. First, we will believe in the importance of obeying. And second, our obedience will not be earned. This is because we will have received it as a gift. We depend upon Christ to help us to obey the law and lead a righteous life as we depend upon Him for forgiveness before God. God is more than willing to both make us righteous and to give us the victory over sin and self. As always, success depends on our will: how willing are we to make the daily surrender<sup>12</sup> of self to Him so that we can know Christ better? As Paul says, "I want to know the power that raised him [Christ] from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings. I want to become like him by sharing in his death" (Philippians 3:10, NIV).

**Read over the verses for today again. Where do you see the reality of human free will? What does Paul**

8. cheap grace—the belief that the law of God is no longer binding and does not need to be obeyed. The belief that it does not matter what we do as long as Christ's love lives in the heart. Cheap grace is also the belief that—because we are saved by faith and faith alone—what we do has no bearing on our salvation.

9. legalism—the belief that one can earn salvation by obeying the law.

10. circumcised—to have cut off the skin (called the foreskin) at the end of the penis (of a man or a boy).

11. Pharisee—a member of an ancient (from a long time ago) Jewish group that followed Jewish religious laws and teachings very strictly.

12. surrender—the act of giving control of our lives over to Christ.

mean in verse 16 when he says “let us live up to what we have already reached”? (NirV). What choices can you make that will let you do just that?

### FRIDAY—APRIL 1

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Testing Process,” pages 88, 89, in *Testimonies*<sup>13</sup> for the Church, volume 4; “Righteousness by Faith,” page 161, in *Gospel [Good News] Workers*; “Faith and Acceptance,” pages 49–55, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law requires righteousness—a righteous life, a perfect character. And we cannot give this on our own. We cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ came to the earth as man. He lived a holy life. He developed a perfect character. He offers these as a free gift to all who will accept them. His life stands for the life of men. So they have forgiveness of sins that are past, with God’s permission. More than this, Christ fills men with the good qualities of God. He builds up the human character in the likeness of God’s character, which shows spiritual strength and beauty. So the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. Romans 3:26, NirV.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 762.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Read again the Ellen G. White quote given for Sabbath. Write a para-

graph, in your own words, describing what she is saying. Then bring it to class on Sabbath. Listen to one another’s paragraphs and share your own. What main points are made?

② In class, discuss your answer to Tuesday’s last question.

③ When we put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness, we “all display [show] the Lord’s glory. We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory”<sup>14</sup> (read 2 Corinthians 3:18, NirV). Describe what displaying (showing) the Lord’s glory means.

④ Over the years, some church members have struggled with the question of assurance<sup>15</sup> of salvation. How are we to understand what it means to have assurance? Where can we find that assurance? How does the symbol of a robe of righteousness woven “in the loom of heaven” without a thread of human effort (work) help us understand where our assurance can come from? How can we know we are not just guessing that we have that assurance?

⑤ Why is it so important to know the difference between what Christ has done for us (He justifies and forgives us the moment we accept Him as our Savior) and what He works out in us throughout our lives? What dangers arise if we do not keep that difference clear in our minds?

13. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

14. glory—great power, beauty, and royal perfection.

15. assurance—a strong feeling of being sure or certain about something.