

Psalm 30:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;

Analysis

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. This verse vividly describes transformation from grief to joy, using physical imagery—mourning to dancing, sackcloth to gladness-garment. David celebrates God's complete reversal of his circumstances, demonstrating that divine deliverance isn't merely stopping bad but actively providing good.

"Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing" (הָפַךְתָּי מִסְפֵּדִי לְמַחְולִ לִ) depicts radical transformation. Hafach means to turn, overturn, change, transform—sometimes violently (as in overthrowing Sodom, Genesis 19:25). Misped means mourning, lamentation, wailing—especially mourning for the dead. Machol means dancing, round dance, festive dance. Ancient Near Eastern mourning included weeping, wailing, tearing garments, sitting in ashes, wearing sackcloth—outward expressions of inner grief. Dancing expressed opposite—joy, celebration, victory. These weren't mild emotions but intense expressions. God transformed David's life from one extreme to another.

The preposition "for me" (li) emphasizes personal experience. God didn't generally decrease sadness in the world; He specifically turned MY mourning into dancing. This personal testimony invites others to seek similar transformation. Jeremiah 31:13 promises: "I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow."

"Thou hast put off my sackcloth" (תִּשְׁלַח פִּתְחָתָךְ/pittachta sakki) continues the transformation imagery. Patach means to open, loosen, untie, remove. Saq means sackcloth—coarse dark fabric woven from goat hair, worn during mourning, fasting, or repentance. Putting on sackcloth symbolized grief, humility, repentance. Removing sackcloth signified end of mourning, restoration, joy. God actively removed David's mourning garment—divine initiative, not human self-improvement.

"And girded me with gladness" (וַתַּעֲزֶזֶנִי שְׂמְחָה/vatte'azreni simchah) completes the transformation. Azar means to gird, bind on, equip. Simchah means joy, gladness, pleasure, celebration. The verb suggests putting on a belt or garment—girding for action or celebration. God didn't merely remove sackcloth leaving David neutral; He clothed David with joy. Isaiah 61:3 similarly promises God will give "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Revelation 19:8 depicts the church "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

The verse's two-part structure (turning mourning/removing sackcloth) emphasizes completeness. God both stops the bad (mourning ends, sackcloth removed) and provides the good (dancing begins, gladness given). This models comprehensive redemption—salvation from and salvation to.

Historical Context

Mourning rituals in ancient Israel were elaborate and public. When someone died or disaster struck, mourners tore garments, put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, wailed loudly, fasted, and sometimes hired professional mourners to increase lamentation (Jeremiah 9:17-18). Sackcloth was uncomfortable, scratchy, dark—physical expression of inner anguish. Wearing sackcloth declared to community: I am grieving, suffering, repenting.

Conversely, celebration included dancing, music, festive garments, feasting. Women danced celebrating military victories (Exodus 15:20; 1 Samuel 18:6). David danced before the ark with all his might (2 Samuel 6:14). Wedding celebrations included joy, dancing, fine clothes. The contrast between mourning and celebration

was stark—one couldn't simultaneously mourn and dance, wear sackcloth and glad garments.

David's transformation from mourning to dancing parallels his experience described in the psalm. He faced serious illness bringing him to death's door (v.2-3), experienced divine anger (v.5, 7), cried out in distress (v.8-10), and received healing (v.2). His recovery prompted clothing change—from sackcloth to festive garments—symbolizing life change from death-threat to restored health.

Old Testament prophets used clothing metaphors extensively. Isaiah 61:1-3 (quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19) describes Messiah's ministry: comforting mourners, giving beauty for ashes, oil of joy for mourning, garment of praise for spirit of heaviness. Zechariah 3:3-4 portrays removing filthy garments and clothing with rich apparel, symbolizing forgiveness and restoration. These images communicated powerfully in clothing-conscious ancient culture.

Early church adopted these metaphors spiritually. Paul instructs: "Put off...the old man...put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24). Colossians 3:9-10 commands: "Ye have put off the old man...and have put on the new man." Baptism symbolized this transformation—going down in "old clothing" of sin, rising in "new clothing" of righteousness. Christian life involves continual transformation—removing sin's sackcloth, putting on Christ's righteousness-garment.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does the transformation from 'mourning into dancing' teach about God's salvation being comprehensive (not merely stopping bad but providing good)?
2. How do the physical metaphors (sackcloth, dancing, gladness-garment) help us understand spiritual realities of transformation?

3. In what ways do believers experience this transformation from mourning to joy, and how is it both instantaneous (conversion) and gradual (sanctification)?
4. How does Isaiah 61:1-3 (which Jesus quoted) connect to this psalm's themes, and how did Jesus fulfill this ministry of transformation?
5. What responsibility do believers have to 'put off' old patterns (sackcloth) and 'put on' new life (gladness), and how does God empower this transformation?

Interlinear Text

פָּתַח חַתָּם	לִלְמָחָלָה	לִלְמָחָלָה	לִלְמָחָלָה	לִלְמָחָלָה	לִלְמָחָלָה	לִלְמָחָלָה
Thou hast turned	for me my mourning	into dancing		thou hast put off		
H2015	H4553	H4234	H0	H6605		
my sackcloth	and girded	me with gladness				
H8242	H247	H8057				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 31:4 (Parallel theme): Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.

Isaiah 25:8 (Parallel theme): He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 (Parallel theme): A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

Psalms 149:3 (Parallel theme): Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.

2 Chronicles 20:12 (Parallel theme): O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.

Psalms 150:4 (Parallel theme): Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Psalms 4:7 (Parallel theme): Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

Psalms 30:5 (Parallel theme): For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Luke 15:22 (Parallel theme): But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

2 Samuel 6:14 (Parallel theme): And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.