

## ZECHARIAH 3: THE HIGH PRIEST'S DIRTY ROBES

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 5/23/21, Matt Heerema

We are continuing our series through the minor prophets this morning in Zechariah. Please turn there with me. Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets. Same chapter count as Hosea, but more words. It has been called "little Isaiah" - because it picks up on many of the same themes and uses similar imagery.

The book is very complex and as far as an efficient summary and outline of the book as a whole, I don't think I can do any better than the Bible Project's book Overview videos, so I'd like to start today by showing that so you have some idea of the whole of the book, and then I'd like to do something a little different for this morning's sermon. I'd like to dive in to a very small section of the book, one of my favorite parts of the entire old testament, in chapter 3, and focus on the beautiful picture of God's grace that Zechariah shows us there. So first, let's watch the video.

[Show Bible Project Video]

Of all of the themes that Zechariah uses in his roller coaster of visions and declarations, some commentators have said, and I think I agree, that the central verse and point of the entire book is chapter 4, verse 6:

### **Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)**

6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

Israel's breaking free from its bondage to foreign rule will not come by its military might, but by God's Spirit doing God's work.

Israel's defense against the overwhelming force of invasion from world armies will not come from its strength of weaponry or political allies, but by God's Spirit doing God's work.

Israel's return to prominence and power will not come by political maneuvering or any human power structure putting it in a place of prominence, but by God's Spirit doing His work.

God's people being holy and righteous and returning to faithfulness to God's covenant will not come by the might of their zeal, or the power of their will.  
It will come by God's Spirit doing His work.

And it is this last part that I want to focus in on.

# JOSHUA'S FILTHY GARMENTS

## **Zechariah 3:1-4 (ESV)**

3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. 4 And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."

What is going on here:

- A court scene. Joshua, the high priest is on trial.
- Satan: an accuser - with an accusation: filthy garments. "This one has made himself unclean and unworthy." Not a false accusation.
- A brand plucked from the fire: one who was subject to destruction by fire, but was mercifully pulled out and saved.
- High priest before the angel of the Lord, means he would have gone through ritual purification rites prescribed by God to Moses, and he would have been wearing garments specifically designed and created for the purpose of being worthy to enter God's presence: yet the judgement on his garments: filthy.
- The Lord's reply to the accuser? Not a denial of the accusation. But a fixing of the problem: "Remove the filthy garments from him. Behold I have taken your unworthiness away. I will clothe you with pure clothing."

This passage carries a specific prophetic message that the video outlined very well, but it does another thing that I'd like to focus on: it illustrates one of the central pillars of the gospel: imputed righteousness.

## **OUR INABILITY TO BE HOLY ENOUGH**

Imputed righteousness is the idea of God considering us to be righteous, when in fact we are not, based on work he's done for us. We've talked about this several times over the past year or so, but it is a concept that bears repeating. In this passage, we see this plainly with God having Joshua's dirty clothes replaced by pure ones.

Zechariah is picking up on statements made in previous centuries by the prophet Isaiah:

### **Isaiah 64:6a (ESV)**

6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

Zechariah fleshes this statement out by making it personal and related to current events, instead of a vague “we all”, he personifies all of Israel in the High Priest (this was the priest’s job, to represent all the people before God...).

The High Priest would have gone through special cleansing ceremonies prescribed by God in order to be able to appear in the Holy of Holies with the sacrifice for the people. In other words, if there was ever a person “religious enough” or having done all the right deeds to *earn favor with God*, it would have been this guy.

And yet the judgement on Joshua, and thus all of God’s people is “filthy”.

Hear that.

We all are aware of our sin and how that makes us guilty before God. None of us measure up, and we know it. But Isaiah and Zechariah are showing us that not even when we think we *have nailed it spiritually*, that it earns us any “bonus points” or anything like that.

No amount of consistency in our quiet times. No perfect attendance record at church. No amount of serving in a ministry. No amount of sharing the gospel with a neighbor or friend. No amazing sermon. No success in counseling. None of that earns us anything with God.

And I think most of us know that even if we’re banking on the times we did really great, we’d be sunk, because the failure always outpaces the success.

If we would be righteous before God, based on our work, we’re sunk.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul picks this theme up.

(We’ll dive into the middle of him talking about Abraham’s faith...)

### **Romans 4:2-5 (ESV)**

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Would you be righteous on judgement day when standing before the court and God's judgement seat? Then follow Abraham's way. The way of faith. Don't try to do it yourself.

Bank on Jesus Christ's work for you.

Zechariah has some of the richest prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, borrowing from and boiling down imagery from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah - which is all picked up hundreds of years later by John to say the same thing in Revelation.

That Messiah is the one who will do all the work of removing the sin of the people by taking it all on himself, making his robes filthy in front of God. And suffering the right punishment for that filthiness, in his people's place. God asks for our trust in his work, that he's going to do it.

Joshua could have said, in that courtroom, "no no no, God, I don't want new robes, i want to be judged by these I already have on. I think they're just fine." But he was wise enough not to.

## **SO WHY BOTHER TRYING?**

So if we're unable to be holy enough, good enough, to earn God's favor, should we even bother trying? Well, this is where the rest of the teaching is important. Because to put on the clean robes of Christ, to trust in God's provision of righteousness through his work, IS to put on a new way of life.

In other words, what happens when we put on Christ? We put on pursuit of righteousness holiness. Not to earn, but to be who we are. To respond. Ephesians puts it this way.

### **Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)**

22 ...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The rest of Ephesians goes on to describe the way of life that results from putting on Christ. It would be a good application point for you to read Ephesians 4:22, through the rest of the book.

But the application I want us to focus on this morning is this:

## **WHEN THE ACCUSER COMES FOR US**

What's going to happen when it's our turn to stand in that courtroom instead of Joshua the Priest? When Satan would accuse us of our failure to measure up, what will our reply be?

When Satan would drag you in to the court room and puts you before the judgement bench: The Throne of God above, and accuse you of wearing filthy garments, what will your reply be?

You don't have to reply. Joshua didn't. God spoke up first. "This is one that I plucked out of the fire. His clothes, her clothes, they are dirty. Give her new ones. Give him new ones. This one is mine. Behold, I have taken away her sin!"

As for us, we can reply. Songs are a good battle cry. One of my favorites, which will sing in a moment, puts it this way. Let me set it up:

When we're in the spiritual court room, and the accuser asks "how do you plea?"  
We don't need to fumble around with excuses. We don't need to deny the reality of our sin and failure. We do need to recognize our plight: that we are standing before a holy God with polluted souls. We need to repent and believe the gospel, and put on Christ.

Look the accuser straight in the eye and tell him: "You want to know what my plea in this court against your accusations in front of God on his throne is?"

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea  
A great high priest whose name is Love, who ever lives and pleads for me  
My name, is engraved on his hands. My name is written on his heart.  
I know that while in heaven He stands, no tongue can tell me to depart!

When satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within,  
upward I look and see Him there, who made an end of all my sin.  
Because the sinless savior died, my sinful soul is counted free,  
for God, The Just, is satisfied to look on him and pardon me!

Behold Him there, the risen Lamb! My perfect, spotless righteousness.  
The great, unchangeable I am! The King of Glory and of grace!  
One with Himself, I cannot die! My soul is purchased by his Blood  
My life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ my savior and my God.

Let's sing that together!