

Title: Accused!
Text: Zechariah 3
Theme: Justification
Series: Zechariah #4
Prop Stmtnt: Only Christ can remove true guilt.

Read Text:

Do you feel that you are not good enough? Do you fear that you do not belong? Do you fear that you do not measure up? Do you live with the sense of dread that someone is going to find out the truth about you? You really do not have what it takes. You really aren't that smart, or that creative, or that skilled. Whatever others are expecting of you, you can't come through and it is only a matter of time before people discover it. What are you going to do when people discover that you are just average, or maybe not even average? Don't you hate to let people down? All of this is a heavy weight to bear, but there are heavier ones that burden us.

Do you carry the shame of sin? Is there something that you have done that you fear cannot be forgiven? What do you feel accused of? What do you feel ashamed of? What secret griefs and fearful thoughts do you carry dreading their exposure and shame?

What I have just described drives many people to withdraw because one of the lies that we are prone to believe is that I struggle alone. Not only am I not alone in my struggle with sin, but what I have just described is the story of every single person in this room. It also describes an OT priest named Joshua.

Let me reset the stage. The city of Jerusalem was basically destroyed. The Temple was demolished, the walls were broken down and the city gates were all burned with fire. The Jews who were exiled to Babylon in 586 were permitted to return. Many of them returned, but life in the land of Israel was hard, very hard. The government was a mess, and the religious life of the people was no better. There was no temple, which meant that there was no sacrificial system. There was no means by which the people could have their sins forgiven and be able to live in harmony with God. They started to rebuild the Temple, but the work was hard and they faced some intense opposition and betrayal even in their own ranks, so they quit. Now, Haggai and Zechariah are calling the people to finish rebuilding the Temple. But, even if they rebuild the Temple, there is another problem. The priests are unclean. How can a priest help other people with their sin when he cannot remove his own sin?

On the night of February 15, 519 B.C. Zechariah has a series of visions. These visions from God serve to encourage him to motivate the Jews to finish rebuilding the Temple because God has not forgotten them. God has a plan for his people and he will carry it out. While some of the visions are global and national, this one is personal and national and in way, global, as we will see. A prophet (like Zechariah) is commissioned to represent God before the people. He speaks to the people what God has spoken to him. A

priest is called to represent the people before God. So, this high priest is not only standing before God on his own account, but also on account of the people of God.

This vision is of a courtroom, perhaps the throne room of God. Later in this text we discover that some of Joshua's colleagues were there as well. Given the nature of this trial, do not think of this courtroom as a little Wayne County or Macomb County courtroom. This is a heavenly scene. The witnesses would be in the millions. Joshua's shame would be seen by all.

I. **The Problem of Guilt** (1-4)

Joshua was the high priest and as such he was expected to oversee the offering of sacrifices for the sins of the people of Israel. Sin is a serious issue. It is deeply personal but it does not stay hidden. We struggle inwardly, but our sin affects the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we view and treat others. As the high priest, Joshua was looked to as the one who would help his people address their sin, but Joshua had a problem. He was unclean. Joshua could not help others with a problem that he could not fix for himself.

A. **My guilt is real.**

Satan (whose name means accuser) is prepared to live out his name. He is there, next to the high priest for one reason, and that is to accuse him. Satan does not have to make anything up either, does he? Joshua is standing there in dirty clothes. Dirty is too soft of a word. The word translated "filthy" actually refers to human excrement and vomit. Joshua has done more than break the dress code for the courtroom. He is a stench. He is making others sick. He is repulsive.

I knew a man who wore clothes like this. Later on my concerns about why he and his clothes smelled so badly were confirmed. I had to fight the urge to gag whenever I was with him. When someone suggested that he use soap, he was "offended." His feelings were hurt. But wait a minute! What is wrong with that picture? The man was offensive and it wasn't because he didn't have any options, it was because he chose to live that way. He chose to be offensive and got offended when someone who cared about him pointed it out. Our sin makes us offensive to God. Joshua is offensive and Satan knows he is offensive and is ready to pounce. He is just waiting to accuse. Our sin gives ammunition to our accuser. The tips of the arrows of accusations that are shot into our hearts have drops of truth on them.

B. **My guilt affects others.**

Compounding the problem was the fact that there was no king in Israel. There were governors, many of whom were corrupt, but there was no king. The line of the kings from David appeared to have been broken. This meant that the role of the High Priest would carry even greater authority in the nation. Joshua had a lot to live up to. But, how could he? How do you help your daughter deal with the crippling fear of what others think or

may say when you don't handle it yourself? How do you help someone else be content when you are so angry and dissatisfied? How do you teach someone forgiveness when there are people you refuse to forgive? Joshua has an enormous problem. Because he is unclean, everything he touches becomes unclean.

C. My guilt is inexcusable.

Sin is truly inexcusable. There is no excuse that a person can make to God that will cause God to wink and look the other way. God cannot tolerate evil. He is too pure, too righteous, too holy and too consistent to look the other way. He does not always punish sin immediately, but he always punishes sin ultimately. What excuse does Joshua give for wearing an unclean garment in the presence of God? None! He has no excuse. There is nothing for him to say. Guilt is a serious problem and it often feels like an insurmountable one. But, guilt is overwhelming when people do not know or do not accept the rest of the story.

D. I cannot fix my guilt.

Joshua has a problem that he cannot solve. How can he stand in the presence of God when he is so offensive? He can't! So, does God tell him to go out and buy a new coat? Pay for a new coat? Raise money and rebuild the temple? Donate a stained glass window for the church? Feed the poor? Have pity on the weak? Try harder? Just try harder? Be more devout? Does God demand penance? Does God demand promises of discipline and resolve to do better? Just do better. Just do more. You can always do more. Is that the message? The strictest and most disciplined life will fail you. Joshua was unclean and there was no means by which he could be cleansed. He had a problem that he could not fix.

Satan will accuse you of sin in order to destroy you. Satan will work in harmony with your own heart to accuse you of things in order to render you hopeless. Sin entices you. It beguiles you. It thrills you. Then it snares you. It keeps you. It empties you. It demands you. It commands you. It rules you. It condemns you. Satan adds his voice to the voice of your own heart so that you hear one thing: You cannot get out. You have no hope. No one wants you. No cares about you. You are nothing! Oh yes, Satan will accuse you of sin in order to destroy you, however, God will expose your sin in order to redeem you.

II. The Pure Robe (1-5)

A. God's mercy is real.

Satan stands as the prosecuting attorney and is poised and ready to announce to the universe the sins of Joshua. But before he can utter a word, God speaks. And when God speaks, nothing else is heard. God silences the accuser with his own Word. You will not hear the accuser if you listen to God. "The LORD rebuke you O Satan." Can you imagine the utter shock that Joshua experienced at this moment? His case is called up and standing there ready to accuse him is none other than Satan! What defense can you

muster against this one? Not only that, but Joshua can look at his own clothes. He knows that he is unclean. He is the high priest! He knows the law. God wrote the law and now Joshua, standing, obviously guilty, waiting for the accusations to be announced and listed for the entire universe to hear, meaning that there would be no where for him to hide, is bracing himself only to hear God thunder his rebuke to Satan! What an amazing moment! Instead of being condemned in front of the world, Joshua hears his accuser rebuked!

B. God is serious about salvation. (2)

Look at what God says. “Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” Do you see what he is saying? The Jewish people have just been rescued from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem and Judah. Babylon is about to get crushed (vision 2). God says that he rescued his people like snatching a burning stick from a fire and if he went through all of the trouble to do that, then he is not going to stand quietly and let Satan puke out his vomitus accusations.

C. God is the one who does the justifying. (4)

I love this! Here, over 500 years before Christ, we have a picture of the incredible doctrine of justification as clear as it can be. What does God, through his angel say? “I have taken your iniquity from you.” God did that. You cannot do that. You cannot remove the stain of your sin, but God can. You have no stain remover. The best stain remover that you have only makes the stain worse. The best stain remover that you have is works righteousness and works righteousness only makes the problem of sin go even deeper. God does not put a Band-Aid over your sin. He throws it away. He removes the filthy garment because he has removed your iniquity. You cannot remove your iniquity. Your religious deeds cannot remove your iniquity. Your devotion, alms, donations to the poor, moral deeds cannot remove your iniquity. Only God can remove your iniquity, but God does not more than remove your iniquity. God gives you new clothes! Your robe is sinful and God removes it. Then he gives you a pure robe. By the way, how much did Joshua have to pay for the new robe? NOTHING!! You cannot pay for it because you cannot take credit for it. It is a gift!

Zechariah knows what this means! He is so excited he says, “*Let them put a clean turban on his head.*” And they do.

Satan is left with nothing to say.

III. Why does this matter? (6-10)

This answers one of the fundamental questions that every person asks. We all want to know: where did I come from, what went wrong, what can we do about it, and what happens to me after I die? How does a secular world view answer those questions?

Where did I come from? You evolved from a primordial soup. There is no story, no plan, no meaning. Nothing really matters. (I wonder what would happen if you told your

nihilistic professor at college that since nothing really matters, that you are not going to pay for your class, since, it doesn't matter.)

What went wrong? You could say, we're still evolving. We haven't worked all of the kinks out of the system yet. Or you could say, that we since we did evolve, there is no such thing as something being truly wrong and that the idea that something is wrong is the product of your sub-culture imposing its own morality upon you. Nothing is truly wrong in and of itself. There is only what appears to be wrong to you and what appears to be wrong to me.

Even though what I have just said is the party line and the talking points in many classrooms, those ideas do not truly resonate with people and they do not pass the experiential bar. For example when someone goes into a club and shoots 102 people, killing 49 of them, what happens? It is all over the news. A frenzied search begins to find clues about the shooter, motives, background, etc. Meanwhile, the names of the victims are released and some of their stories are told. Wait a minute. Hold the phone! Why do we care?! If we really evolved, and therefore, there is no ultimate right or wrong and life as we know it really is defined by "the survival of the fittest", then why do we care when a few people die? Why is that headline news and not back page stuff? Why don't we dismiss the entire matter with glibness since there are a few less people to share the earth's limited resources with? This stuff is headline news around the world because instinctively we believe that we came from somewhere, that life matters somehow, somehow, and when we experience events like this, we are horrified and deeply affected because in our heart of hearts we know, we really know that something in this world, in our own lives has gone horribly wrong.

But, if you are not willing to take an honest look at the first two questions, then what do you do with the third? What do we do about it? How are you supposed to think about the evil that is in this world? What do you do with that? There is a deeper and even more difficult question. What do you do with your own evil? What do you do when you realize that the biggest problem in this world is not the evil out there, but the evil in your heart?

We may never know the entire background to the shooting last weekend, but there is a possible scenario that illustrates this point. The shooter was identified by many as being Muslim. The shooter was also identified by many as struggling with and participating in homosexuality. The Islam religion is well known for its laws. It has many rules. It also has very severe consequences for those who break the rules; even though no one agrees it seems on all the rules, nor on what all the consequences should be for those who break them. If you really take it seriously it is a religion of fear. You fear that you are offending Allah. You fear that you are offending an Imam. In our terminology, we would say that it is a religion of all bad news and no good news. It is all law and no gospel. Because it is all law, you have no certain hope that your law-breaking offences can ever be forgiven, especially if you struggle with and participate in sins like homosexuality that are considered to be highly, highly wicked. In fact, homosexuality is considered by some in the Muslim community to be so wicked that every person caught in this sin should be executed. Therefore, anyone who dies in a Jihad, executing the enemies of Allah has

chance of having his sins forgiven. Based on what I have read, I think that it is possible that the shooter carried out a murder/suicide as an attempt to pay for his own sins. In other words, he was trying to answer this third question. What do we do about it?

Most religions have a form of “you pay” in an attempt to answer that question. You have to pay for your sins with penance. You have to pay for your sins with good works. You have to pay for your sins with Hail Mary’s and Our Fathers. You have to pay for your sin by killing infidels. You have to pay for your sins by helping the poor. You have to pay for your sins by contributing monies to the church. You have to pay for your sins by doing works of charity and donating to relief organizations. But, no one knows how much is enough. This vision of Zechariah’s is a preview of the gospel. This is an illustration of what Christ accomplished. In verse 8, God tells Joshua that he is going to bring to Israel his servant, the Branch. By saying this, God is promising to bring the Messiah. He is promising to send Christ.

A. It is a preview of the gospel.

When Christ came to this earth, he lived a perfect life in your place. Everything that he did fulfilled the law of God. Only God could keep God’s laws and only a human could pay for a human’s sin. So God became man and Christ lived in your place. When Christ died on the cross, he offered up his perfect life to the Father as the payment for your sin. His good was perfect. His good was good enough. His perfect life qualified him to offer, in your place, the perfect and complete sacrifice in order to pay for your sins. So, Christ lived the life you could not live and he died the death that you could not die. His death purchased your forgiveness and his life provides you with perfect righteousness.

When you understand this, and believe this as being true and being true for you, your sin is removed from you. Your putrid, foul and offensive sin, like Joshua’s robe is taken from you. That is what we call forgiveness. Your sin is forgiven. We all also call it expiation. Your sin is removed from you. As far as the east is from the west, it is removed from you. But that is only part of the good news. When you trust in Christ, not only is your sin removed from you, but the righteousness of Christ is credited to you. Do you see it now? Joshua’s filthy robe was taken away and he was given pure vestments. He was given a perfect robe. This is an illustration of the righteousness of Christ that is given to the believer.

Romans 3.21-26

But this vision includes more than a preview of the gospel and how we can be justified before God.

B. It is a preview of the Kingdom.

In our form branches in our form of government: executive, legislative and judicial. In the OT, the government of Israel also had three types of government that were to balance each other out. There was a king. There was a high priest and there was usually a prophet.

During David's reign and during part of Solomon's reign we see a picture of the glory of the kingdom when these three components work well together. Sadly, there were too many bad examples of kings, priests and prophets. But, here in Zechariah we have a preview of the King, who is called the servant and the Branch of God. We have Zechariah as the prophet and Joshua as the priest. One of the basic needs of the people of God was to have a perfect prophet, perfect king and perfect priest. That need is fulfilled in Christ.

Joshua needed to be cleansed because as an Old Testament priest if he wasn't cleansed, his people couldn't be cleansed. Therefore, Joshua's cleansing was not only for him, but he represented the people that God would cleanse through Christ.

Israel was the Old Testament people of God. We are the New Testament people of God. They were nation with priests; we are a kingdom of priests.

Conclusion:

- What does God think of people who treat others as if they have no hope?
- How are we supposed to respond to accusations?