

Clean Garments for the Priests

Zechariah 3:1-5

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

How difficult is it to boldly approach the throne of God? Even though Scripture states we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalms 139:14) as ambassador's (2 Corinthians 5:20) and royal priests of Christ (1 Peter 2:9), how many times do we crumble in the shame and guilt of our sin? Even though we know that Satan is the "father of lies" (John 8:44) and seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), then why do we allow him to define our value before a holy God? Should we truly listen to him when he says our filthy rags of righteousness (Isaiah 64:6) proves we are not acceptable living sacrifices (Romans 12:1)? Remember the great accuser knows how to wield shame and guilt into our lives not for the purpose of motivating repentance but to keep us entwined in sin (Hebrews 12:1) and distant from God! While we know this to be true then why do so many Christians go long periods of time distant from God due to their fear that His throne is not one of grace and mercy but judgement and punishment? This sermon is going to review Zechariah's vision of Joshua the high priest and in doing so suggest if we want to boldly approach God's throne then we must first put on the clothing that Christ has bought us so that our filthiest of rags might be acceptable in God's sight!

Shame and Guilt of Israel

Even though Abraham was considered righteous in God's sight (Genesis 15:6) his stiff-necked offspring (Acts 7:51) had a hard time remaining a faithful, covenant partner. Despite having been warned that forsaking God's commands would lead to their outright rejection (2 Chronicles 28:9), Israel chose to marry foreigners and in doing so put up Asherah poles and worshipped foreign gods. Even in hearing Jeremiah's weeping pleas that God would not destroy Israel, God gave them over to the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of Yahweh in 586 B.C.E.¹ The most prominent of society were deported while the poorest were left to work the lands.² After having been exiled for 70 years Babylon was conquered by Persia whom permitted Israel to return to a "greatly diminished



¹ Duke, "Chronicles," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (IVP, 2006), 165.

² Ibid.

version of their exiled Promised land,"³ the Persian province of Yehud.⁴ Upon their return the remnant could not help but wonder if their not having the land or king⁵ was further proof that God, whom controls history, had not fully accepted them back as His covenant partner!⁶

Accusations Against the Priests

“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him” (verse 1)

In verse one we learn that at the heavenly court Satan was trying to get God to condemn Joshua the high priest. Joshua is well known to us from the books of Ezra (Ezra 3; 5:1-2) and



Haggai (1:1-11). His lineage can be traced to the Zadokite priests whom Ezekiel praised for their faithfulness during the exile (44:10-16).⁷ Despite being a direct descendant of Aaron and being specifically called by God to offer sacrifices in the new temple, we read that Satan is standing in the court room at the right hand of Joshua which was the position of accusation under the law (Psalms 109:6).⁸ In the presence of God Satan gets ready to accuse Joshua, whom represented Israel⁹ and ultimately all believers everywhere (Job 1-2; Revelation 12:10),¹⁰ of having sinned. In Satan's opinion Joshua

should be rejected as God's chosen, after all according to Satan he still had the marks of God's

³ Martin J. Selman, 46.

⁴ Louis Jonker, "Who Constitutes Society? Yehud's Self-Understanding in the Late Persian Era as Reflected in the Books of Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 4 (2008), 704.

⁵ The theological questions for the post-exilic Israelites was: what meaning should they give to the eternal, Davidic Covenant when they had no king and no city?" (Taken from: Raymond Dillard, "The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *Journal of Evangelical Society* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 207).

⁶ Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Frankfurt, Germany: Verlag Peterlang, 1989), 134.

⁷ Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 250.

⁸ Kenneth L. Barker, "*Zechariah*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 623.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

judgment upon him.¹¹ Satan makes his accusation in hopes that it might convince He whom has no darkness in Him (1 John 1:5) to reject not only Joshua as high priest but His chosen people once and for ever!¹²

Satan's accusation is not limited to just Joshua but to all believers! Every man and woman who knows the power of Christ in his/her own soul, to purge and cleanse him/her from dead works, is appointed to serve as a priest unto God."¹³ As we "living stones are being built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5) Satan is constantly accusing us of not offering our "bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1) but instead gratifying our carnal



pleasures (1 Peter 4:3). He enters the battleground of our minds (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) and despite knowing that God has "not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7), he roars and seeks to devour (1 Peter 5:8) our view of the standing we have before a holy God! He tells us that God's demand for holiness (1 Peter 1:16) will not be met by our filthy rags of presumed righteousness (Isaiah 64:6)! He tells us that our sins are so utterly heinous that not even a contrite and

broken heart (Psalms 51:17) will be acceptable as a living sacrifice. He floods our minds with tides of overwhelming shame and guilt that crushes our souls and leaves us in desperation. His goal is for "us to search and try our hearts in the sight of God's law" so that our failure to hit the impossible mark of 100 percent obedience (Romans 3:23) might prove that like all others we are not right in God's sight!

Defense Part 1: God Chose Us

² The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" (verse 2)

¹¹ John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 219.

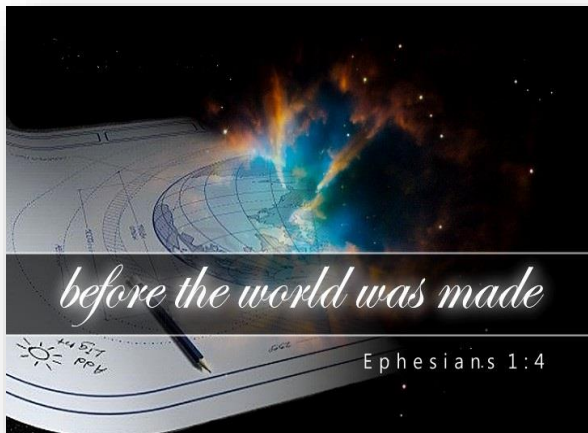
¹² Kenneth L. Barker, "[Zechariah](#)," 623.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Zechariah's Vision of Joshua the High Priest](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 11 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1865), 50.

Rather than try to deny Satan's accusations against Joshua and his people,¹⁴ Jehovah silences Satan¹⁵ by reminding him that it was God who chose Israel to be separate and a light unto the nations!¹⁶ Even though Joshua and Israel had been recently released from being under God's judgment in Babylon¹⁷ this did not mean that God had forsaken them permanently! God removed Israel from the burning fire of His punishment to be restored as His covenant partner. God's acquittal of Israel did not mean that He did not recognize her sin but that after having punished her for 70 years He now chose out of His electing love to maintain "His everlasting covenant with their Head, the Divine Son of David (Psalms 89:30-35; Philippians 1:6)¹⁸ by restoring their position before His throne. Satan could



have listed all the sins that Joshua and Israel had ever committed as a rebuttal but at this point, he remained silent. While Satan was permitted to make accusations, we must not forget that he who tried to ascend to heaven and establish a throne above God failed to do so (Ezekiel 28) and as such continues to be "subject to the dictates of the Sovereign Lord!"¹⁹



If you knew that you were going to be taken up into the heavenly court this very night and would face a trial that would determine your eternal destiny, heaven or hell, whom would you pick as your advocate? You might be tempted to choose mom or dad, a brother or sister, a colleague or friend. While choosing someone whom has always had your back might seem like a wise choice, do you honestly think that that person can stand up against the

"seal of perfection full of wisdom and beauty" (Ezekiel 28:11) whom is cunning enough to

¹⁴ Mark J. Boda, [*Haggai, Zechariah*](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 251.

¹⁵ A. R. Fausset, [*A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Jeremiah-Malachi*](#), vol. IV (London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d.), 667.

¹⁶ Kenneth L. Barker, [*"Zechariah,"*](#) 624.

¹⁷ Mark J. Boda, [*Haggai, Zechariah*](#), 252.

¹⁸ A. R. Fausset, [*A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Jeremiah-Malachi*](#), 667.

¹⁹ Richard D. Patterson and Andrew E. Hill, [*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 10: Minor Prophets, Hosea-Malachi*](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 544.

simultaneously appear like angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) while he is trying to devour their soul (1 Peter 5:8)? As Satan points out the sins of your advocate do you honestly think they will have any integrity before a holy God? Like Joshua we need the Lord whom is sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21) to be our advocate for He alone is beyond Satan's attempts at character assassination! And like Joshua the first defense our Lord is going to make on our behalf is the fact that like Israel we were chosen before the foundation of the world to be the Lord's portion (Ephesians 1:3-14). Since we have the same faith as Abraham had in God, we too are his descendants and part of God's chosen people (Romans 4:16-17) and as such have an irrevocable covenant with God that not even Satan can change!

Defense Part 2: Cleansed by the Blood of Christ

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you." (Verses 3-4)



The second part of the defense of Joshua is the removal of his sin by the work of the Messiah.²⁰ Joshua's clothes being covered with the human excrement²¹ of sin were filthy! How could the temple rituals begin again when not even the high priest was without shame and guilt of his own impurity?²² In verse four the Lord called upon angelic beings of the court to remove Joshua's filthy clothes²³ to symbolize that the Lord had removed his sin, thus justifying his position before a holy God.²⁴ On the basis of the "Messianic Servant's substitutionary death, Joshua and ultimately Israel's sins were

forgiven."²⁵ Once these filthy clothes had been removed Joshua was promised to one day receive festive robes that symbolized the costly and imputed righteousness of the Lord.²⁶ He who would hang upon a tree (Galatians 3:13) would purchase his and all of humanity's freedom from the entanglement of sin! Joshua must have been overwhelmed with joy to know that Israel

²⁰ Kenneth L. Barker, "[Zechariah](#)," 624.

²¹ Mark J. Boda, [Haggai, Zechariah](#), 252.

²² John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, [Minor Prophets II](#), 220.

²³ Joyce G. Baldwin, [Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 28, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 121.

²⁴ Kenneth L. Barker, "[Zechariah](#)," 624.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ A. R. Fausset, [A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Jeremiah–Malachi](#), 668.

would be fully cleansed and restored “as a kingdom of priests for God” upon the ushering in of the Messianic Age!²⁷

The perpetual position of every believer should be like that of Joshua, standing before the throne of grace to be forgiven.²⁸ Upon self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28) whom amongst



us could ever say that we are clothed in anything but filthy rags? While God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:4-12) we are not to forget that He will provide the strength to endure, the wisdom to confess (1 John 1:8-9) and the ability to boldly approach His throne with the knowledge that He prefers to extend mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:16). When a person feels they are drowning in the tidal waters of shame and guilt stand firm and have faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ because a contrite and broken heart is the only and best sacrifice we have to offer. I love this quote by Spurgeon:

“Then, if I can bring Him nothing but my tears, He will put them in His bottle, for He once wept; if I can bring him nothing but my groans and sighs, He will accept these as an acceptable sacrifice, for He once was broken in heart, and sighed heavily in spirit. Gracious God, I bless thee that I have not to present my sacrifice directly to thyself, else thou wouldst consume my sacrifice and me with the flames of thy wrath; but I present what I have before thy messenger, the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus, and through Him my prayers find acceptance wrapped up in His prayers; my praises become sweet as they are bound up with bundles of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, from Christ’s own garden; then I myself, standing in Him, am accepted in the Beloved; and all my poor, defiled, polluted works, though in themselves only objects of divine abhorrence, are so accepted and received, that God smelleth a sweet savour. He is content and I am blessed. See, then, the position of the Christian as a priest: he is to stand before the angel of the Lord.”²⁹

Never think about renouncing your service to the Lord because of your filthy rags. Instead of using sin as an excuse to not serve, repent so that the human excrement of sin might be washed away in the presence of He who bought you at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). Since God has accepted Christ in the “room and place of the poor sinner with filthy garments,”³⁰ who can ever

²⁷ Kenneth L. Barker, [“Zechariah,”](#) 623.

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Zechariah’s Vision of Joshua the High Priest,”](#) 50.

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Zechariah’s Vision of Joshua the High Priest,”](#) 56.

bring an accusation against you that would ever reverse God's electing love towards your eternal destiny in Him (Romans 8:33)?

Conclusion: Case Dismissed

Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So, they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by (verse 5).

To finish off the court proceedings Zechariah asked that a clean turban be placed on Joshua's head to signify that God had accepted both him and the people of Israel (Exodus 28:36-



38)! Having found in favor of the defendant on the bases of His Son's atoning sacrifice, God dismissed the case against Joshua and Israel! While Satan will always accuse us of having fallen short of God's glory this does not mean that we are to see God's throne as one of mere punishment alone. While He who fearfully and wonderfully made us disciplines us from time to time that does not mean that He outright rejects us nor does it mean He prefers wrath to mercy and grace. While offering our contrite and broken hearts in and of themselves are not enough to be forgiven, through belief in the atoning

sacrifice of His Son they become a sweet offering and fragrance of forgiveness, restoration and peace with a holy God! So, the next time Satan tries to overwhelm you with guilt and shame remember that in wearing the clothing Christ has purchased on your behalf you can boldly approach God's throne as a forgiven, masterpiece of His grace!