

# **The Priest with Dirty Clothes**

## **Zechariah 3**

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### **Introduction**

When I was growing up, a friend and I decided to build a fort on the side of a clay hill. We dug into the side of it and then put a covering over the hole so that we would be hidden. It was great fun, but every time we played there our clothes would end up being filthy. We would have clay caked on our clothes. My mom would make me enter the house through the garage so that I could take my clothes off in the garage. They were so dirty she didn't want them in the house.

The passage we will be looking at today tells the story of a priest who had dirty clothes. The prophet Zechariah is being shown a series of 8 visions by the Lord. This passage is the 4<sup>th</sup> of those visions.

Zechariah 3:1-10

Background: God had sent his people into exile because of their idolatry and refusal to obey his laws. But finally the Lord began to bring his people back to Jerusalem. The first order of business was to rebuild the temple. While they started off strong, they quickly faced opposition and the building stopped. You can read more about this in Ezra. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah delivered the word of the Lord to the people that motivated them to complete the temple.

### **The Court Room**

#### **The Angel of the Lord**

The "Angel of the Lord" is seen throughout the OT. There is a great debate as to who this is. In some instances the angel is identified as God – Genesis 16:11,13 & Judges 6:11,14. However, in other instances the angel is distinguished from God (2 Samuel 24:16). In this passage we find that Joshua is standing before the Angel of the Lord, which gives us the impression that the Angel is sitting as a judge. Some people argue that the Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Christ, and certainly this would be in keeping with our understanding of Christ – he is coming to execute judgment. But we must be careful to not be dogmatic about this.

#### **Joshua**

Joshua is here identified as the high priest. As the high priest he was the one responsible for entering the most holy place to make atonement for the sins of Israel. God had chosen the tribe of Levi to serve as priests, but out of that tribe he chose those of Aarons' family to serve him as high priest.

While the office of high priest was no doubt an important position in Israel, it had gained even more prominence in the life of Israel after the exile because they had no king.

We learn in verse 3, that Joshua was standing there in filthy clothes. The Hebrew word can be translated "human excrement." So we are not simply talking about dirty clothes that need to be washed. These are clothes that need to be thrown out. These are clothes that are repulsive to those looking on. The idea that is being conveyed here is that Joshua as the High Priest represents Israel in

their sin against God. They had turned to idolatry and had forsaken the Lord their God who had brought them up out of Egypt. So God judged them sending them into exile.

### **Satan**

So, we find Satan close at hand ready to make accusations against the people of Israel. He is the archenemy of the people of God. His name simply means "accuser." He takes an active role in Job 1-2, as he appears before God asking permission to bring tragedy upon Job in order to turn him away from God. We see his character revealed in Revelation 12:10 that he is the accuser of the brethren. His purpose is to discredit God's people by appealing to the holiness and justice of God and pointing out our short-comings.

He is there, standing at the Joshua's right hand.

### **Verdict Against Satan**

Before Satan is even able to speak, the Lord speaks. He tells Satan first that he is rebuked. Rebuke is a word that moves beyond mere verbal disapproval. It indicates that not only does God disapprove, but God will also actually put an end to the attacks of Satan.

The reason the Lord rebukes Satan is because the Lord has chosen Jerusalem. God in his infinite Sovereignty has declared that Jerusalem belongs to him. In this case I believe that Jerusalem is to be understood as Israel. Jerusalem was the place that God had chosen for his glory to dwell. A rebuilt Jerusalem meant that Israel was being restored. God's choosing of Israel was not because of anything they had done, but rather we read in Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

To prove his choice of Israel, God asks this question, "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" In other words, Joshua who represents all of Israel, has been rescued from the judgment of the Lord. God was bringing his people up out of Babylon just like a stick that is snatched from the fire before it is completely burned.

Satan is silenced and rendered powerless. One thing we can learn from this is that Satan is always under the authority of God. That is one reason I said early he is the archenemy of God's people and not God. Don't have a Star Wars mentality about the way Satan and God interact. However, be careful because he walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is constantly throwing the fiery darts that we need to resist.

### **Verdict of Forgiveness**

This passage does not actually record any spoken accusations from Satan, but they are certainly implied by the fact Joshua is standing in filthy clothes. And of course, Satan's accusations are true – God is holy and Israel has gravely sinned against him. God's holiness demands that judgment be made against his chosen people because of their wickedness. How will this problem be resolved?

The angel of the Lord gives Joshua new clothes. He commands those who are standing near to take the old clothes off of Joshua and to clothe him with pure vestments (rich garments – NIV; festal robes – NASB). Here we see a beautiful picture of God removing the sins that Israel had committed against him. Sin must be removed. No where in scripture do we find sin being overlooked, or swept under the rug. It may happen for a while, but ultimately the sin will be dealt with.

Not only is the sin removed, but righteousness is given to Israel. The clothes that are given speak of glory. They are costly clothes that would have been worn only for special occasions. The turban that is given speaks of honor. Israel would be restored to honor, because God was no longer against her.

Connections to the gospel:

- We are sinners standing before a holy God
- There is nothing we can do to gain righteousness
- God removes our sin through the shedding of the blood of his son
- We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ

These connections come alive when we consider that verses 8-10 speak of the coming of the messiah. God is going to send his servant the Branch and the iniquity of the earth will be removed in a single day.

If we were the ones to have seen this vision – Joshua standing before the Holy God clothed in filthy clothes, Satan standing to accuse him – we would have quickly realized that unless God intervenes this is not going to be good for Joshua. He doesn't stand a chance. But we learn here that we serve a God who intervenes in our lives. He has provided a way of salvation. He as the God of all comfort, comforts those who mourns. He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us in truth. God is active in our lives.

The angel goes on to tell Joshua that it is imperative that he walk in obedience to the Lord (6-7). This is consistent with the teaching we find in the NT. *Colossians 2:6-7 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

Just as we have been forgiven of our sins we are to walk in the newness of life we have been given by the Lord. Paul goes on to describe how we can walk in the Lord in chapter 3:5-17. There is no doubt that Paul takes sin seriously as we should as well. We are told to put it to death. Get rid of it. He says put them away. Or in the language of Zechariah – Paul is telling us to take off these old garments. But then he goes on to say we need to put on the new garments that are ours in Christ Jesus.

In a practical sense, I think it would benefit us all to examine our hearts and ask the question, what is holding me back from walking in Christ? What sins am I allowing to rule my life? We did this with the youth at our retreat.

While this is something practical that you can "do" rest assured that it still God's grace that empowers and enables us to grow. It is as we read and meditate on God's word that the Holy Spirit begins to convict us of sin. It is as we have fellowship with one another that God by his grace will use the people in our lives to point out the sin that we are so blind to.

## **Conclusion**

In this passage we learn about who God is: Holy, Loving, Judge, Merciful, One who brings Hope. Receive the gift of life he offers in Christ Jesus and then walk in him.