

GOD'S PLANS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS
ZECHARIAH 3:1-10

I've told the story before, but because it fits so well with this passage, because Reformation Day is next Monday, and because I like the story, let me remind you of **Martin Luther's** conversion story (in his words):



I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," [Rom. 1:18] because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and **whereas before** the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven....

If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.

What plagued Luther's mind was an awareness of his guilt of sin, and his inability to rectify that problem on his own. He longed to serve God, but he was terrified of God's wrath. Perhaps you have experienced similar fears — an awareness of guilt and unworthiness and a similar awareness of your inability. The fourth vision of Zechariah in Zech. 3 is for you.

There is a transition in the fourth vision. The first three visions were concerned with external realities — Israel's liberation from captivity in Babylon, God's judgment against the nations (and His salvation of the nations) and the ultimate blessings on Judah and Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. The fourth and fifth visions are concerned with spiritual realities. This vision addresses the question, "How will unclean and unholy people experience the blessing of God?" How can those who are stained with unrighteousness be blessed by the holy God?

GOD COMFORTS SINNERS BY THE REMOVAL OF THEIR SIN THROUGH THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

This morning, we consider Zechariah's fourth vision:

1. What Zechariah **SAW** in the Vision (3:1-3)
2. What Zechariah's Vision **MEANT** (3:4-5)
3. What Zechariah's Visions **REVEAL** About God (3:6-10)

1. What Zechariah SAW in the Vision (3:1-3)

- The first two visions were in a valley outside Jerusalem and the third vision was in Jerusalem; the fourth vision moves to the temple courts and the throne room of God in Heaven. While the location of the vision has dramatically changed, *then* connects it to the previous visions.
- The main character of this vision is *Joshua*, the high priest.
 - ✓ This is not Joshua who led Israel into Promised Land after the exodus (he lived ~1000 years earlier).
 - ✓ This Joshua was among the first returnees from the Babylonian captivity. He is often mentioned with Zerubbabel, who was governor of Judah/Jerusalem (**Ezra 2:2**) — different roles but considered to be equal in stature and importance.
 - ✓ He was widely known and mentioned several times in Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
 - ✓ His father Jehozadak had gone into exile in 586 B.C., so when the nation was returned in 538, he may have been around 50, and by the time of these visions (519), perhaps near 70.
 - ✓ Despite his age, he was instrumental in erecting the altar and restoring the sacrifices (**Ezra 3:2**), and organizing the work of rebuilding the temple (**Ezra 3:8-9; 5:2**).
 - ✓ Even more importantly, his official role is *high priest*.
 - The priests had three levels of hierarchy — Levite, priest, and high priest; Joshua was at the top.
 - His position was hereditary (he was a direct descendent of Aaron through Eleazar). And it was for life. All priests were consecrated for their service (**Exod. 29:1-7ff, 29; Lev. 21:1ff**), but only the high priest was anointed with oil (along with receiving unique attire, **Lev. 21:10**).
 - Among his most important responsibilities was entering Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkling blood of sin offering on the Ark of Covenant (**Lev. 16:1ff**) for himself *and the nation*.
 - In addition to his spiritual responsibilities, the high priest of this day also had an expanded administrative role (fundraising for the temple and overseeing construction).
 - In summary: “He was the very essence of purity.” [Laney] Both in personal conduct (sin) and ritual cleansing, he was to be set apart and distinct for his ministry.
- In this vision, Joshua is *standing before the angel of the LORD* (Christ, v. 4b). It is a courtroom scene.
 - ✓ And along with Joshua is also *Satan*, standing to *his right*.
 - ✓ The word “Satan” is not just a name, but a description of what someone might do — accuser.
 - ✓ In fact, this word has the article — “*the* accuser.” While that title can be used of human accusers and enemies, it is also used particularly of Satan (with the article) in Job 1-2 — this is the particular accuser and enemy of God’s people. Of all enemies, Satan especially is opposed to God’s people.
 - ✓ It’s notable that the function (accuser) was equivalent to his personal name, Satan/accuser — and his physical position (right hand of Joshua) and his words reflect his accusation of Joshua.
 - ✓ The accusation is that Joshua is unclean and unfit for ministry because of his defiled garments (**v. 3**).

- ✓ The accusation is that Joshua, despite his longevity, is unfit for ministry and service.
- ✓ Don't forget that the high priest also represented the nation:
 - On his attire, his breastplate contained 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - His most important duty was to represent the nation on the Day of Atonement.
 - The accusation of Satan is against Joshua, *and against the nation* — they are both illegitimate representatives of God.
- ✓ Charles Feinberg [44] summarizes the vision saying, "The opposer opposes the high priest by dwelling on the sins of the people of Israel that God might cast them from His presence irrevocably and forever....The picture is dark indeed, for how can the nation stand in the light of the accusations of the Adversary?"
- While Joshua is the object of accusation, he never speaks in this vision; Christ defends him.
 - ✓ **The LORD said** is probably a reference to the angel of the LORD (v. 1) because it would be odd to say, "the LORD said, 'the LORD rebuke you...'" (would expect simply, "The LORD said, 'I rebuke you...'")
 - ✓ The second member of the Trinity (Christ, the Angel of the LORD) invokes the first person of the Trinity's rebuke against Satan. The rebuke is administered by the authority and power of YHWH.
 - ✓ To **rebuke** Satan was a strong denunciation and threat (even curse) against Satan. There could not be a stronger, "You're wrong and you have no authority to make the accusation."
 - ✓ The rebuke is re-emphasized by **indeed the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you...**
 - The basis for the rebuke is based on the authority of God as God.
 - And the rebuke is also a reminder of God's covenant relationship with Israel (He is YHWH, covenant God), and He has chosen Jerusalem as His covenanted city for Messiah (2 Chron. 6:6; **Is. 14:1**; **Zech. 1:17**; **2:12**). You can't take away what God has chosen and committed to do.
 - ✓ In a final reiteration God says, **is this not a brand plucked...?** (cf. similar statement in **Amos 4:11**). The plucked brand refers to Joshua, though it also applies to the whole nation: God has sovereignly chosen and graciously sanctified His servant. It looked like all was lost, but God intervened and saved and preserved Joshua and the remnant.
 - God does not defend Joshua by saying, "You're wrong, Satan, he's not unclean..." In fact, he could hardly have been more unclean and dressed more inappropriately (**v. 3**). He *was* unworthy.
 - He defends Joshua by saying that His grace is more than sufficient for any accusation and guilt.
 - ✓ What God has chosen and saved from destruction cannot be revoked. (This is massive encouragement to us about our salvation also; God is our defender and preserver, **Jn. 10:27-29**).
 - Satan will accuse God's people to the end of this age (Rev. 12:10).
 - Even when we are guilty, our hope is not in a rebuttal to Satan, but in God's grace (Rev. 12:11).
- This is what Zechariah saw; what did it mean?

2. What Zechariah's Vision MEANT (3:4-5)

- **He spoke...**, i.e., the angel of the LORD continued speaking
 - ✓ The rebuke of Satan was not all that needed to be spoken; Joshua's uncleanness still needed to be addressed — what were the implications of the filthiness of his garments?
 - ✓ When the **angel of the LORD** spoke, He also addressed other angels who were observing (cf. v. 8).
- **Remove the filthy garments from him** — God is monergistically acting to purify and cleanse him.
 - ✓ It is clear from Lev. 22:3 that if any priest is not ritually clean, then he will be cut off from ministry.
 - ✓ And remember that Joshua is also representing the people. Because he is unclean, they also are unclean (**Haggai 2:14**).
 - ✓ It's even worse than that; because they are unclean, they need someone to intercede for them; but the priest who should intercede is unclean also. So they have no one to receive their sacrifices and intercede for them to God. Their earthly mediator is gone. What can be done?
 - ✓ God **removes** Zechariah's unclean clothing. God acts to take off and put away the defilement.
 - ✓ And in v. 5, he not only removes the uncleanness, but he clothes him with **festal robes...clean turban...[and] garments** (sounds just like our salvation, doesn't it? **Eph. 4:22-24**).
- To this point, it only seems like Joshua's problem is ritual uncleanness. But notice the end of v. 4 —
 - ✓ **I have taken your iniquity away.** Satan's accusation seemed to be about the ritual uncleanness of the priest; but God said it was much worse than that — there was actual sin involved. (This phrase is also why **the angel of the LORD** must be Christ — no angel can remove sin.)
 - ✓ The word **iniquity** refers to perverse acts of deliberate sin. It's the word that was used to indicate what the scapegoat took to the wilderness (**Lev. 16:22**). It refers not just to the acts of sin but the culpability of sin — "you are guilty."
 - ✓ God acted singularly for Joshua to remove his sin and the guilt of his sin. He has been acquitted before the LORD. And don't miss that as a representative of the nation, it also is a picture of the cleansing of Israel (which will also be stated in v. 9).
 - ✓ Notice who it was who acquitted Joshua: **the angel of the LORD** (Christ, who would die 500 years later as the fulfillment of that promise to remove sin).
- Then notice this in verse five — **I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head..."** In a sense, the angel of the LORD stands aside while Zechariah speaks. It certainly appears that he is so excited at this forgiveness that he interjects himself into the vision and also appeals for Joshua.
 - ✓ The turban distinguished the high priest from the other priests (**Ex. 28:39**); but the most significant part of the headdress is what it said: "holy to the LORD" (**Ex. 28:36**). The unclean has been made holy.
 - ✓ What is unique about this declaration is that the command (desire?) of a man is used to accomplish the purposes of God (similar to how God responds to the prayers of His people).

- ✓ “God delights to have us ask Him to do that which is in His heart to do.” [Feinberg, 48.]
- ✓ **while the angel of the LORD was standing by** indicates the approval of the LORD. The pre-incarnate Christ, anticipating His future work, affirms the imputation of righteousness to Joshua.
- Remember the context for this vision: the nation has returned to the land (538 B.C.; the foundation for the temple was laid and for about 15 years, nothing more was done). The nation had sinned in not rebuilding the temple (1:1-5).
 - ✓ The first three visions promised the provision of God to judge the nations and bless Israel/Judah.
 - ✓ This vision promised the provision of God to cleanse the priests for the temple work and to restore the nation to Himself spiritually.
- This vision is about justifying the priest (and priesthood); but it is also about the justification of His people. God will act for their physical provision, and He will also act for their spiritual needs of sin.
 - ✓ There is a consistency in salvation in the Old and New Testaments.
 - Salvation is always impossible for the sinner to accomplish on His own.
 - Salvation always has to do with declaring guilty sinners innocent (righteous).
 - That righteousness is always imputed to sinners by the act of God through the work of Christ.
 - ✓ If you are not a Christian, I appeal to seek the forgiveness of God. You *are* guilty (culpable). There is nothing you can do to remove your guilt. The only thing you can do is appeal to God and trust (as Joshua did), the righteous work of someone else for you (Jesus Christ).
 - ✓ Would you give up your rebellion against God and ask God to forgive and free you from sin today?

3. What Zechariah’s Visions **REVEAL** About God (3:6-10)

- That Joshua has been given priestly robes again indicates his readiness and ability to serve God.
- The angel of the LORD makes clear three implications of Joshua’s salvation.
- **God’s cleansing act of justification necessitates corresponding acts of obedience (vv. 6-7)**
 - ✓ The **angel of the LORD** spoke again in v. 6 — specifically, Christ **admonished** (charged) Joshua with a command. It is a reminder to Joshua, “Just because you are clean again (and forgiven) doesn’t mean you can do things that will make you unclean (or sinful).”
 - ✓ Christ made a conditional statement with two requirements:
 - **Walk in My ways** is a common, generic OT command about obedience — it refers to “covenant fidelity” — being faithful to God’s commands and guidance (e.g., Dt. 8:6, 10; 10:12ff; 28:9).
 - **Perform My service** refers to priestly duty of Joshua — the things that will keep him clean.
 - Combined the commands affirm that he has to fulfill both the moral and ritual responsibilities.
 - These commands relate both to Joshua as an individual and as a representative of the people. God’s responsibilities are not only for a select few — they are for all His people.

- ✓ Christ's conditional statement also came with three blessings (it's good to obey):
 - **Then you will govern My house**, i.e., you will have authority in the temple (priestly role).
 - **And have charge of My courts**, i.e., the areas beyond the temple; it suggests the broader responsibility of the priest — the political and social responsibilities.
 - **And I will grant you free access...**, i.e., "you can walk about with those who are standing here." Who are those people? They are the angels that appeared in v. 4 and acted in v. 5. What does that mean? It means "you can walk with the angels who are in My presence..."
 - ... The high priest had access to God through the Holy of Holies, once a year (Lev. 16).
 - ... God is promising Joshua (and by extension, the people) that if they obey, they will have access to the heavenly throne room of God and immediate intimacy and fellowship with God.
 - ... That's unheard of in the OT. It's an astounding blessing.
 - ... It's also a blessing every NT believer has because of Christ's finished work (Heb. 4:14-16). But like Joshua, we dare not think that we can roll around in the refuse of the world and march into the presence of God with intimate fellowship. You can't come to Him with filthy rags; but you can bring Him your filthy rags and He will cleanse them and invite you into fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:9-2:2).

- **God's cleansing act of justification prefigures the final act of the Messiah's salvation (vv. 8-9)**

- ✓ Having admonished Joshua, the angel of the LORD then addresses **Joshua...and your friends**. He is addressing Joshua as the **high priest** and the ones who serve with him in a priestly function.
- ✓ Joshua has been cleansed (and the other priests along with him — remember he is a representative of the entire nation) but there is another lesson to learn about that. Their cleansing and justification are **a symbol**. That is, their cleansing represents something else — further cleansing.
- ✓ In the prophets, there are often both near (immediate) fulfillments and far (long-term/eternal) fulfillments. It's not often easy to determine when the prophet is using the microscope or the telescope (1 Pt. 1:10-11). But here he is telling us — there is something more happening than just your purification. What is going to happen?
- ✓ **I am going to bring in My servant, the Branch.**
 - **Servant** was used for a variety of God's human servants (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Job, David, and Hezekiah among them).
 - But it was also used particularly of the great servant, the Messiah (Is. 42:1; 53:11). This is the servant who will suffer to accomplish the salvation of His people.
 - This servant is also **the Branch**, another Messianic title (6:12-13; Is. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). It suggests the powerful growth of the Messiah out of the humiliation of the Davidic line.
 - There is also a **stone...seven eyes** — a final Messianic reference:
 - ... Christ is coming as the stone over which some Israelites will stumble in sinful rebellion (even while a remnant is preserved; Is. 8:13-15; 28:16; Rom. 9:30-31).

- ... As the stone, Christ will be established as the head of the church (Eph. 2:19-22).
- ... The **seven eyes** could refer to His omniscience and wisdom, or perhaps to the HS (Rev. 5:6).
- ... What is significant is not what the eyes mean, but what is written on the stone — ***I will remove the iniquity...*** The same word is used as in v. 4 — Joshua's sin and guilt are removed and so is the nation's sin — it is a reminder of the promise of God to fully redeem the nation of Israel at some time in the future (***one day*** — a complete day of salvation; Rom. 11:26-27) — regardless of how things look, the covenant will be fulfilled and the nation will be entirely saved and redeemed.
- This is to say that while there are blessings and fulfillment of forgiveness through Zerubbabel and Joshua, there is an even greater day of blessing coming when Messiah rules on His throne.

• ***God's cleansing act of justification will result in a time of unprecedented blessing (v. 10)***

- ✓ ***In that day*** is another use of the familiar OT phrase to refer to the future day of the LORD; here the prophet is looking forward to the final act of God in the Messianic reign.
- ✓ In that day, the Messiah will reign and ***every one of you will invite his neighbor...***
 - He is looking forward to a time of blessing and peace — neighbors aren't being warned about dangers or called to battle, but they only engage in fellowship and peace.
 - The ***vine*** and the ***fig tree*** denote the blessing and prosperity of God: the nation will be given all that they need to flourish (2 Kings 18:31; Is. 36:16; Joel 2:22; Mic. 4:4).
- ✓ Whatever the nation would accomplish in that day (by rebuilding the temple), there is an even greater day coming when the Messiah brings full and lasting peace and prosperity.
- ✓ Whatever blessing and peace we experience today, there is a greater day of blessing coming in which there will be lasting and final peace and prosperity — and that prosperity is rooted in the Messiah who will provide full and lasting salvation and righteousness for those who believe. Rest in that.

CONCLUSION: What are we to make of this vision? Two commentators summarize it well:

In summary, vision four describes a day of redemption in which Joshua the high priest, typical or representative of Israel as a priestly people, will be cleansed of his impurities and reinstalled in his capacity as high priest. This presupposes a Temple in which this can take place, so Joshua will build such a structure. Again, this Temple is only the model of one to come, one whose cornerstone is YHWH Himself. That cornerstone contains the glorious promise of the regeneration of the nation, a mighty salvific event that will be consummated in one day (Isa. 66:7-9). [Merrill, 129.]

We do well to turn from the men of wonder to the Man Christ Jesus who is the Wonderful, the Prince of Peace. [Feinberg, 54.]

BENEDICTION: Habakkuk 3:16-19