

Cleansing For Dirty People

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could turn with me in your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 3. Zechariah chapter 3, it's also going to come up on the screen. We're continuing, last Sunday evening we began a series in the book of Zechariah and we looked at the first two chapters and now we're on chapter 3.

Let me, this is a vision that Zechariah has, this is his fourth vision. 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.

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?

Now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments 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.

And I said, let them put a clean turban on his head. So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments and the angel of the Lord was standing by in my ways and keep my charge.

[1 : 12] Then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. And now, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign.

Behold, I'll bring my servant the branch. For behold, on the stone that I set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree. Oh, man, may God bless this reading of his word.

Well, as I said, we began a series in Zechariah last week and Zechariah begins with a big command where God says to his people through Zechariah, return to me.

Return to me, return to the Lord and I will return to you. And it's an invitation and it's a command that is given to everyone for those of who aren't for the people then and for us now.

[2 : 18] For those of us not following Jesus, it's a command to come to Jesus for the first time, to return, to turn away from sin and to turn back to a relationship with God.

For those of you who are following Jesus, it's an invitation, it's a command once again to come back to Jesus, to renew commitment with him, to turn wholeheartedly to God.

And last week we saw that that return to me came with a wonderful promise, a promise that God would return to his people to you. I wonder though how Zechariah's readers felt when they first heard those words.

I wonder how you feel when you hear those words. If you remember Zechariah's writing in 520 BC, the Israelites who were taken over by the Babylonians 70 years before and carried off into exile in Babylon have now returned under the new ruler of Babylon, Cyrus.

And to the Israelites, they've just come back from Babylon, they're sitting among the ruins of Jerusalem. I wonder how they would have felt when God says, return to me and I'll return to you. I suspect some of them have thought, is that really possible?

[3 : 29] How can on earth can I have relationship with God again? How can I really come back to God? I'm not worthy. Maybe they would have looked back at their past.

Remember they just spent 70 years in exile because of the wrong things they had done, because they kept disobeying and disobeying God again and again and again until God said, enough is enough and sent them off to exile.

Maybe they thought, does God really want me back? Maybe that's you. Maybe you look at your past, maybe you look at the mistakes you've made, the words you've said, the people you've hurt. And you think, can I really even come back to God? Can I come back to God? How do you even want me? Maybe the people thought, well even if I wanted to, how can I come to God? He is a holy God. Last week we saw God speak about here. He is the holy, glorious God who would come to dwell with his people. And maybe Zechariah's readers thought, well that sounds too good well with him.

[4 : 27] Be his house guest. Have relationship with God. How on earth can I ever meet God's standard? I'm not worthy. I can't do this. Do you look at God and think that?

Do you think that's an impossible standard? I could never live up to God's expectations. Whether you're a follower of Jesus or not this morning, you might feel unworthy to have relationship with God.

Maybe you trusted in Jesus several years ago and have wandered away. Maybe your Christian life you have drifted or you've just plateaued and you've become half-hearted and you feel, well I can't give myself to this.

Maybe you haven't, maybe you've held off committing yourself to Jesus for years and years and years and now feel like it's too late.

You think I wonder if God would even have me? Whatever it is, whether we're living in 2024 in Calaway or 520 BC in the ruins of Jerusalem, we've come to the right place because Zechariah's fourth vision is a promise of cleansing for dirty people.

[5 : 36] That's our title, Cleansing for Dirty People. We've got three points, dirty, clean and the branch. First point, dirty.

This vision takes place in the courtroom of heaven and we see that the angel of the Lord is the presiding judge. The angel of the Lord is a figure that comes up again and again in the Old Testament. You'll notice that in verse 2 he's referred to as the Lord because in fact again and again this angel as he comes out has and which means that many people understand this angel to be God manifesting himself, God appearing to people in physical form.

Some people even think that it's an appearance of Christ before his incarnation. So this is God presiding over this heavenly court and standing before the angel of the Lord is Joshua the High Priest and he's on trial, literally on trial.

That is right hand we're told is Satan. Satan isn't a name, it's a title. It means the accuser and that's exactly what he's doing. He's the prosecuting lawyer accusing Joshua.

We see why in verse 3 we read that Joshua is standing before the angel clothed in filthy garments. Joshua is filthy, not covered in just a little bit of dust, not with a few mud stains but absolutely covered in muck.

[6 : 56] The Hebrew word for filthy there is the same word that is sometimes used for excrement or vomit. In other words, Joshua looks like he's just climbed out of a septic tank or had a bath in a sewer.

He's filthy. And that's a problem because Joshua's a High Priest and High Priests are meant to be clean. They're meant to be holy in fact because the job of the High Priest is to be a mediator, a go-between between God and man, representing people to God and representing God to the people.

But there's a problem if the High Priest is dirty, how can he come into God's presence? God is holy. Only holy people can come into the presence of a holy God.

But Joshua is filthy. And there's a double problem here. First Joshua is meant to represent the people to God and that was shown in what the High Priest wore. He had the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on twelve stones on his chest and inscribed on two stones on his shoulders so that when the High Priest went into the temple he was literally carrying the people on his shoulders and on his heart as he represented them to God.

But Joshua is filthy because he represents a people who are filthy, a people who broke their special covenant agreement, their relationship with God where God said, you, I will be your God and you will be my people.

[8 : 18] Well, the people said stuff that. We're going to live how we want. They broke their agreement with God and they were so filthy with sin that God cast them out into exile.

The people of Israel were dirty with sin but you know what, they're not alone because the state of the people of Israel was in fact just the state of the same as the rest of humanity back then and today.

Because we are all dirty with sin. We are born dirty with sin. As we were sung in Psalm 51, it comes with our nature.

Israel's exile from God's presence and from his land for their disobedience. In some ways their exile was a rerun of the very first exile where Adam and Eve rejected God.

They rebelled against God and so God cast them out from his presence. And ever since then all of us who are descendants of Adam and Eve, all humanity live and are born into that exile outside of God, away from him.

[9 : 22] But each one of us not only has a sinful nature, each one of us actively covers ourselves with dirt. The imagery of dirty garments is a good illustration for sin.

We like to think that our sin is hidden, don't we? We like to hide all of our, we like to hide the things that we do wrong from other people.

The things we've done, we hide in our past. The words we've said, we try to hide in our homes. The things we thought, we hide in our heads. The desires we felt, we hide in our hearts.

All the pain we've caused, all the people we've trampled, all those biting words, all those quick lies, all of the anger, all of the lust, all of the covetousness, all of those wrong thoughts and desires.

But all of that is visible to God. All of that appears on us before God like clothing that is completely splattered with mud and with filth, like splashes of excrement on clothing.

[10 : 25] That's how visible our sin is to God. And it cuts us off from God. And I think sometimes we forget the seriousness of sin. We live in a world that is polluted by sin, that is stained and is full of sin.

That's not me pushing and condemning out there. That's in here as well. We live in a world that is so full of sin, we get used to it. And here the metaphor of dirt is helpful again.

If you're in a white showroom of a new house, you notice the slightest speck of dirt. You notice the bit of mold, the party in that room. You're not going to notice a little bit more mud, are you?

And that's the same in some ways with our lives. When there's mud all around, when the dirt of sin is all around, we stop noticing sin. Can I ask you, have you stopped noticing sin in your own life?

Don't look out there, look in your own heart. Have you stopped noticing sin in your own life? Lots of people have brand new white shoes.

[11 : 29] I noticed that especially in the teenagers who come over for a Bible study once a fortnight. And they like trying to scuff each other's white shoes. They take care not to step in any muddy puddles.

Maybe you've done this. I never actually had any white shoes, but they want to keep those white shoes absolutely perfectly white. And they carefully avoid all the mud. But once the mud goes on them, once their pals have had their fill of scuffing mud all over their white shoes, well, they care a bit less about getting any more mud on them.

Have you stopped caring about sin? Have you become so used to it being scuffed all over you by yourself, by others, that you've become desensitized to it?

Sin is serious. It stains us before God. It cuts us off from a relationship with Him. Not to mention that it spoils and damages our relationships with one another. And it spoils this world.

But how do people who are soiled with sin get back in a relationship with a holy God? Well, in the Old Testament, part of the answer was through sacrifices offered by priests on their behalf.

[12 : 37] Joshua is a sinner too. Joshua can't offer these sacrifices. Joshua can't represent the people to God. Joshua can't plead on behalf of these people to God because he's filthy.

There's no go-between. There's no one who can speak for them. There's no mediator. There's that double problem. The people are filthy and there's no one to represent them to God.

Joshua stands before God clothed in filthy garments. We stand before God by nature clothed in filthy garments. And so we read that the accuser accuses.

Satan's words are not quoted, but we can guess them from the context. These people have sinned. They've broken your law. You know it's true. You sent them into exile.

They have no right to stand here. They deserve to be banished. Have you heard that accusation? Have you maybe looked in the mirror of God's word and seen your heart, seen your sin for what it really is?

[13 : 35] And do you ever hear a second voice? You have no right to be forgiven. You have no place among God's people. You have no hope of standing before God.

Is Satan's right? Is Satan right? Is there no hope for Joshua? Is there no hope for people dirtied by sin like you and me? We'll come to our second point now.

Clean. How will God respond to a dirty people? Well, the Lord responds with a thunderous rebuke, but not at Joshua, at Satan.

Do you see that in verse two? The Lord rebuke you, O Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, isn't just words. Psalm 18 verse 15 says that at God's rebuke, the foundations of the world are laid bare and the channels of the sea are seen.

In other words, God rebuke is like a blast that part sees and dries up oceans. But God directs that rebuke at Satan, not at Joshua.

[14 : 38] And in God's rebuke, we see why. First of all, God is a God who keeps his promises. Twice God identifies himself as the Lord. Do you see that the Lord in capital letters there? Actually, it's not, it should be up there.

But the Lord there, the Lord rebuke, O Satan, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, that's capital letters. It should be in our Bibles because it stands for the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh.

The name that God gave his people, a name that comes with a promise, I will be your God and you will be my people. It's the name that sealed that agreement. Now Israel were unfaithful to that agreement.

They were unfaithful to that promise, but God never was. God keeps his promises. He pursues his people and he doesn't abandon them.

Second God promises to dwell with his people in Jerusalem. He says, I've chosen you. Last week we saw that that isn't talking about modern day Jerusalem. It's an echo of God's promise that he will establish his King David and that line of King David that eventually leads to Jesus.

[15 : 41] That he will dwell with his people, the church. And restoring relationship with God though doesn't begin with us going to God and us finding God.

It begins with God coming. It's his initiative. Third we see that God is merciful. Did you notice that he describes Joshua as a brand plucked from a fire?

That's not like a brand, felt like a branding iron. Here it's like a stick that is smoldering, that is halfway into the bonfire and God says he pulls it out.

That fire is an image of judgment and exile, but God and his mercy has plucked Joshua from the fire. He's plucked Israel from exile. They might deserve the fire of God's judgment, but God has mercy and he pulls them out.

I think that teaches us a lot about the character of God. He's not waiting around a corner to jump out and say, gotcha, when we sin.

[16 : 40] He isn't gleefully dangling us over the pit of hell. He isn't retching at the sight of you. When God sees Joshua in all his filth, he loves him and he has mercy on him.

And John 3.16 reminds us that when God sees sinful humanity, you and I in all our filth, he loves us. While we might be desensitized to sin, God is not.

In his holiness, God finds our sin more revolting than we could ever realize, and yet in God's love he chooses us. From the infinite depths of his mercy, he grabs us and pulls us back from the brink. Is that what you expect of God? When God our Father sees the sin of his people, he draws us close in his compassion. He doesn't push us away.

He draws us from 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. And I said, let them put a clean turban on his head, so they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments.

[17 : 47] And the angel of the Lord was standing by. And his mercy, God does two things for Joshua. Do you notice he removes his dirty garments, first and second, he clothes him with clean garments, and both those things are vital.

In verse four we're told that the removing the dirty garments is symbolic for taking away iniquity, taking away sin. As the dirty robe was taken from Joshua's back, his sin was taken away.

That sin that covered him, that sin that hung on him and reminded him, that brought him shame, that sin, that stain of the past that stuck with him.

It was all taken away with God's command. Have you had your dirty garments of sin taken away? Do you know that release?

Do you know that freedom from sin? God takes off Joshua's sin-stained garments, but he does more than that. He clothes him in pure garments. He puts a clean turban on his head.

[18:45] Why does that matter? Well, our sin separates us from God. It makes us worthy of punishment. But if our sins are taken away, we're no longer condemned. But that doesn't mean we're back in God's house in relationship with him.

Some 24 asks the question, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? The answer, he who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Some 24 sets out the requirements to end. But how can dirty Joshua, how can dirty Israel, how can dirty you and I come into God's presence and be God's house guest and have relationship with him?

Well, we need sin taken away, first of all, but second, we need to be clothed in righteousness. That's the word the Bible uses to describe God's perfection that he gives people, that he clothes people in.

We need God to clothe us in his perfection so that we're dressed for not just an audience with the King of Kings, but to have home, to be home with the King of Kings.

[19:49] Can I ask, have you been clothed? God dresses Joshua, the pure garments are a symbol of being clothed in God's perfection. And Zechariah calls for a turban to be placed on his head to reinstate him as the high priest.

It's beautiful, isn't it? Dirty to clean, sin removed, clothed in righteousness. But then we read verse seven and we think, well, there's a catch.

The angel says to Joshua, if you walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts and I'll give you the right of access to those who are standing here.

In other words, the honor of serving as high priest is conditional on Joshua's obedience. The thing is that won't last long. Joshua is maybe cleansed and clothed, but how long before he gets dirty again?

Is it just going to be dirty, clean, dirty again? What then? Well, before we give up hope, the angel of the Lord speaks again to remind us that ever in verse eight we're told that it's a sign and it's a sign that points forward to one man and to one day.

[20:56] We're on our final point, number three, the branch. Let me read from verse eight. Here now, oh Joshua, the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign.

Behold, I'll bring my servant the branch. Who is this branch? Well, Zechariah is echoing prophecies that were made 70 years ago, a bit more than 70 years ago, even by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah who spoke of this individual, this branch who would come.

Jeremiah chapter 33 verse 15, God promises this, in those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, Jerusalem will dwell securely and this is the name by which it will be called, the Lord is our righteousness.

This branch is another name for God's promised King, his Messiah, the one who will come from David's line and make all things new, restore all things. Jeremiah goes on to say he'll be a priest king who will offer sacrifice to make God's people righteous.

[22:02] Well, who is this man? Who can fulfill such a role? In Matthew one verse 20, another man has a dream. He's just found out that his fiancée is pregnant and he knows that it's not his.

An angel appears to him and says Joseph son of David do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She'll bear a son and you will call him.

How does God respond when he sees us in? We expect him to recoil but in his love he draws an ear and he draws near by sending his son.

You might not know but Jesus is the Greek form for the Hebrew name Joshua. Joshua means the Lord is my salvation, the Lord saves. But Jesus is the greater Joshua because Joshua was a high priest who was clothed in filth.

He was a sinner like you and me but Jesus was clean. He was fully God and fully man and that passage we read that we began with in Hebrews tells us that Jesus walked this earth like us and that he was tempted in every way as we are but without sin.

[23 : 16] He was clean. He was spotless and as a result he didn't need his own sins to be cleansed. He could stand before God as the spotless son of God.

But in love he chose to get dirty. He chose to get filthy so that you and I can be made clean. In verse 9 Joshua says that, set a stone before Joshua as a promise that one day he'll remove iniquity, remove sin from the land in a single day.

And that day was just under 2000 years ago when Jesus was nailed to the cross. It's a strange place for a priest but on that cross Jesus offered a sacrifice.

He offered himself. On that cross Jesus put on the dirty garments of sin that clothe his people and as our great high priest he stood before guns.

He didn't say like with Joshua take off his garments. Remember Joshua was a stick pulled from the fire. Well Jesus is the branch who was thrust into the fire.

[24 : 19] Who bore the wrath of God, who bore the punishment of God for all the sins that were placed on his shoulders in all the garments of dirt and filth that belong and should belong to you and I.

And he suffered taking God's punishment for sin. If we have trusted in Jesus then he has taken the punishment for us. He has taken our dirty garments and in exchange he gives us clean garments, robes of righteousness.

This is wonderfully summarized in 2 Corinthians 5.17 where we read, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we could become the righteousness of God.

Let me ask again, have your dirty garments been taken away? Have you laid them on Jesus and said Lord take my sin?

Let me ask again, have you asked to be made clean? Have you received the pure white garments of Jesus' righteousness? God says return to me and I'll return to you.

[25 : 28] Well do you feel like the sins of your past prevent you from coming to God? Lay them on Jesus. He can take them all. Do you fear the accusing voice of Satan?

In Romans 8 verse 1 Paul says that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Lord of Christ because Jesus has met that standard and he gives his righteousness freely for you to wear.

Do you look at the future and think I couldn't keep it up? I'll just keep on sinning. We have a great high priest who's not only offered himself as a sacrifice for sin once for all but has passed into the heavens, who intercedes for us, who gives us his spirit and who is preparing a home for us and who will one day return to make all things new.

God says return to me and I'll return to you. Verse 10 reminds us that that is an invitation for all. In that day he declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his victory.

Come. Have you come? Have you come to Jesus? He will take your sin. He will clothe you in his righteousness and he'll welcome you into paradise.

[26 : 44] Let's pray.