

Gone in a Single Day **Zechariah 3:1-10**

In the name of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep on Good Friday.

The early history of our church body is fascinating. Some of the spiritual shepherds who came from Germany in the 1850s were not always faithful. One man entered our synod as a Lutheran but led his congregation into the Methodist church within a year. After he begged to be brought back into the Wisconsin Synod, he was given another parish, which he also led away from Lutheranism. Other ministers learned that the new land, America, was not all they expected, so they returned to Germany. Another pastor was dismissed by his congregation, then kicked out of town by the townspeople (for good reason). Our young synod needed its own seminary to train quality shepherds for God's flock.

Satan knows if he goes after the shepherd, the flock will suffer a lot of collateral damage. So he targets pastors.

In our Good Friday text from Zechariah, we see Satan going after the high priest Joshua. The devil was playing prosecutor, accusing the high priest of sin before God's supreme court. But the Lord was on Joshua's side, and the charges were dismissed.

In the midst of this exchange, the Lord makes a prophecy about Good Friday. Let's hear this dramatic episode as recorded in Zechariah 3:1-10.

Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan was standing at his right hand to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn't this man a burning stick plucked from a fire?" Now Joshua was clothed in filthy clothing and was standing in front of the Angel. Then the Angel of the LORD spoke to those who were standing in front of him: "Remove his filthy clothing." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, so that I may clothe you in a special robe." I said, "Let them place a clean turban on his head." So they placed a clean turban on his head and got him dressed, while the Angel of the LORD was standing by. Then the Angel of the LORD spoke solemnly to Joshua: This is what the LORD of Armies says. If you will walk in my ways and carry out my ministry, then you will also govern my house and watch over my courts, and I will give you access among those who are standing here. Now listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates who sit in front of you—because these men are a sign. Look! I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Look carefully at the stone that I placed in front of Joshua! On one stone with seven facets I will engrave an inscription, declares the LORD of Armies, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, declares the LORD of Armies, each one of you will invite his neighbor to join him under his vine and under his fig tree.

Joshua may have been the high priest, but he was still human. That gave Satan plenty of material to draw on. He could dredge up guilt from Joshua's boyhood, his foolish actions as an adolescent, mistakes he had made as Israel's religious leader, and evil thoughts that may have lurked in the heart of this man who appeared so holy in his priestly robes.

None of that was unknown to the Lord or to Joshua. He may have been the highest figure in Judaism, but his conscience could not conceal his personal transgressions. Each priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins before he could offer sacrifices for the people. Joshua could feel the heat of the flames that he knew he deserved. What a relief, then, to hear the prosecutor ordered to back off.

"The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn't this man a burning stick plucked from a fire?"

The Lord had chosen Jerusalem, signifying all the Jewish people, including this “burning stick.” Yes, Joshua deserved to be damned, but he had been snatched from the fire of judgment by the grace and mercy of the Lord. Your charges will not hold up in *my* courtroom, Satan!

Picture yourself in a courtroom. The judge, seated above everyone else, is weighing the evidence and pondering the verdict. You feel everyone’s eyes on you, because you are the one on trial. The prosecutor is none other than the great accuser, Satan himself. He’s got a ton of evidence on you.

The truth is, Satan owned us. All his accusations could stick, because they are all true. “Look at the evidence, Judge. Many people can testify how they have been hurt by the defendant’s selfish actions. I also have audio of the defendant’s colorful language. Here is a list of worship services missed because something else was more appealing. This exhibit is a catalog of times when the defendant made flimsy excuses not to serve. As for the defendant’s thoughts, well, we don’t want to be here all day. I think you have seen all that you need to see to convict.”

Our text says, *“Now Joshua was clothed in filthy clothing and was standing in front of the Angel.”* The word translated as “filthy” comes from a Hebrew word that could be applied to a baby’s diaper. How disgusting his clothes were, especially for one standing in the Lord’s presence! Our garments don’t look or smell any better. We deserve to meet the same fate as a dirty diaper or to be used as a stick to stoke the stove in hell’s kitchen.

But we burning sticks have been snatched from the fire, like Joshua was. The Lord who chose Jerusalem has also chosen you. Jesus raced into the fire of hell on Good Friday to prevent you from roasting in those flames.

But what about the filthy clothes that Joshua was still wearing? The Lord has plans for that too. *Then the Angel of the LORD spoke to those who were standing in front of him: “Remove his filthy clothing.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken your guilt away from you, so that I may clothe you in a special robe.” I said, “Let them place a clean turban on his head.” So they placed a clean turban on his head and got him dressed, while the Angel of the LORD was standing by.*

“A special robe”! “A clean turban”! Doesn’t Joshua look and smell much better? What’s left for the accuser to accuse? The formerly filthy felon now looks like a dignified high priest. More important, he is declared holy. He can now appear in the presence of the Holy Judge.

Your filthy clothes have been taken away; Jesus himself will now wear them! In exchange, Jesus dresses you in his own spotless garments. They are now your new wardrobe! The prosecutor’s charges are dismissed. Isaiah describes the complete makeover in these words:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD. My soul will celebrate because of my God, for he has clothed me in garments of salvation. With a robe of righteousness he covered me, like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest, and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry (61:10).

Zechariah has more good news for us. *“Now listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates who sit in front of you—because these men are a sign. Look! I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Look carefully at the stone that I placed in front of Joshua! On one stone with seven facets I will engrave an inscription, declares the LORD of Armies, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.”*

Israel’s priests were “symbolic of things to come.” They were set apart for the Lord, as evidenced by the priestly robes. They interceded with the Lord for the people, picturing the work of the Savior. And they sacrificed countless lambs, foreshadowing the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice would make all animal sacrifices unnecessary.

Jesus, who is also called the Branch in Isaiah and Jeremiah, will branch off from the root of Jesse’s family tree and grow into a large plant in which the birds of God’s kingdom can find shelter (Mark 4:32). Jesus would also be a stone, a firm foundation, with an inscription identifying him as a servant

and Savior. This may refer to Pilate's sign that identified the crucified victim as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Now an even clearer reference to Good Friday: *"I will remove the sin of this land in a single day."* In fact, it could be translated, *"I will remove the sin of the earth in a single day."* That is why we are here to give thanks on this day. Every person's sin...every pastor's sin...removed on a single day...by a single sacrifice...by a single Savior who snatched us burning sticks out of the fire.

The Judge has rendered his verdict, and he will not change his mind. You are acquitted. You are forgiven. And you are dressed in the clean garments of Christ's righteousness.

Going morally astray from God means we forfeit our home in heaven, just as Adam and Eve lost their garden home when they violated God's law. That is the tempter's goal. The devil was kicked out of heaven, and he doesn't want us to be there either. But Satan, for all his fuming, lost that argument too.

Then the Angel of the LORD spoke solemnly to Joshua: This is what the LORD of Armies says. If you will walk in my ways and carry out my ministry, then you will also govern my house and watch over my courts, and I will give you access among those who are standing here.

God's first requirements for sinners is that we repent, that we turn away from our sin and toward our Savior. When the Jews asked Jesus about the works God requires, he answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent"* (John 6:29). Trusting in Christ and his merits alone, we will always have access to God's house on earth and his courts in heaven.

As a priest, Joshua had greater responsibilities because the priests were "symbolic of things to come." They were held to a higher standard, just as today's pastors are. At a pastor's ordination, he promises to faithfully teach the Word of God. *"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught"* (Titus 1:9). On Good Friday and every Sunday, I am obligated to faithfully announce God's grace-filled gift—forgiveness for all sins.

Only through holding to that unconditional gospel does a pastor walk in obedience and keep God's requirements. Only through aiming to imitate the Good Shepherd does a pastor retain the privilege to govern God's house and have charge of his courts. Only through proclaiming the "it is finished!" of Good Friday—and believing it himself—will a pastor retain a place among the standing before the Lord.

You and I are being watched by our Savior. It is both a warning and a comfort. The Lord says: *Look carefully at the stone that I placed in front of Joshua! On one stone with seven facets I will engrave an inscription, declares the LORD of Armies, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, declares the LORD of Armies, each one of you will invite his neighbor to join him under his vine and under his fig tree.*

Jesus is our cornerstone; he is engraved with an inscription that identifies him as the Lamb of God, the Rock of our salvation, the Resurrection and the Life. The seven facets or eyes on that stone symbolize his constant vigilance. He is aware of those who depart from his truth, and he is also keeping a protective eye on his faithful ones to keep them safe.

Jesus is excited to bring us to the place he has been preparing for us since his ascension. It is a place where we will be safe, where we and our neighbor know that under the cross of Christ there is forgiveness; under the vine of Christ there is abundant fruit; and under the fig tree of Christ there is cooling shade from the hot, harsh world.

Satan went after the supreme Shepherd, the highest Priest, on Good Friday, hoping to make him fall. Had Jesus failed, we would be forever wearing filthy clothes, disqualified from a home in God's holy heaven. Instead, Satan failed, while Jesus succeeded in removing the sin of the world in a single day. The price has been paid. It is finished! Your new forever home is waiting.