

Zechariah 3:1-5

There is a great problem that stands in the way of every human dream of perfection. It corrupts our every program, condemns all our plans and confounds all our promises. The problem is sin.

In the visions the prophet, Zechariah, has seen so far, God has spoken of rebuilding, of returning in his glory, and of gathering the nations but, in order to do so God has to deal with the great problem of Israel's sin.

Thesis

In Zechariah 3:1-5, we are shown Satan, our accuser, rebuked by the angel of the Lord and the glorious picture of sin removed and righteousness bestowed together with the assurance of our acceptance in Christ, our great High Priest.

1. Accusing Adversary vv. 1, 3

The problem of Israel's sin is symbolized in this vision by a man named Joshua, who was the high priest. He went once a year into the most holy place, the place where God manifested His presence, to offer a blood sacrifice to pay for all the sins of the people of God. So the high priest was very careful how he dressed. When the people sinned, they brought their atoning sacrifices to the temple but God would only accept them on the basis of a sacrifice offered by a holy priest. The statement on the high priest's turban, 'holy to the Lord' confirmed that God regarded this man as holy and gave assurance to the people that their sacrifice would be accepted.

Joshua is standing before the angel of the Lord on trial in God's courtroom. Instead of being spotless he is wearing filthy clothes (**Zech 3:3**).

Then we see Satan standing at Joshua's right hand as his accuser. Joshua as high priest was representative of the people as a whole. The accusation against him is another way of pointing out the unworthiness of the entire people God has promised to save so wonderfully in the preceding visions.

2. Divine Rebuke vs. 2

Joshua may have had nothing to say, but there was another who had words for the occasion, namely, the angel of the Lord, the second person of the Holy trinity, the Son of God in pre-incarnate form. Sinners have nothing to say to Satan's accusations, but this angel of the Lord, whom we know as Jesus Christ, can reply on our behalf. He is the One who stands up to Satan's accusations and turns them back upon him. Christ rebukes Satan on the basis of God's election and because God has already saved His people as burning sticks snatched from the fire (**Zech 3:2**).

3. Removed Sin vv. 3-4a

Israel's problem was succinctly summarized in the plight of their high priest (**Zech 3:3**). Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.

This is how each of us actually is in our sins as we stand before the Lord.

The angel of the Lord turned to the other angels in attendance and commands them, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Then he said to Joshua, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments" (3:4). Christ takes away Joshua's sin. This is a picture of our own redemption in Christ. This is how we should reply to our fears, to our sense of guilt, and to the accusations of the devil: with the blood of Christ that says to us, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you."

4. Imputed Righteousness vv. 4b-5

The Bible teaches that it is not enough for us to have our sins forgiven: we also need a righteousness in which to stand before God.

The perfect actual obedience that Christ rendered on earth is that righteousness by which we are saved. His righteousness is imputed to me so that believers are counted as having perfectly obeyed the law themselves. This is the kind of righteousness the angel of the Lord provided to Joshua the high priest.

What the angel bestowed was not a righteousness achieved by Joshua but the righteousness of another—an alien righteousness—the righteousness of Jesus Christ in all his glorious perfection (**Romans 4:5-6**).

Zechariah interrupts the vision, spontaneously crying out as he sees the clean garments being placed over Joshua's shoulders (**Zech 3:5**). The piece of clothing Zechariah was longing to see put on, therefore, was that which proclaimed the priest (and thus the people) holy and accepted. The vision comes to completion with this priestly headdress, which symbolizes our assurance of acceptance.

5. Great Savior

Perhaps Satan tried to bring down Joshua again but Joshua knew what to do from this time forward.

The same should be true for us.

We can be sure that Satan will find us when we are weak, when we are alone, when we are downcast after failure or proud because of success.

He will come to accuse us and say, "You are a very great sinner." It will be true.

Will you defend yourself with empty claims to a righteousness of your own or will you turn to the gospel proclaimed by Zechariah, to the Savior sent from God to redeem his people from their sin?