

04/11/10

Who Are You #1 – Ashamed or Forgiven? Zechariah 3:1-10

- Every day practically every one of us does certain things that are similar...
 - we might be different in a zillion ways, but there are still definite commonalities...
 - for example, if I asked you – did you eat anything yesterday, I think most people would say “yes”...I highly doubt that anyone would respond with – you know, I just forgot, I never got around to it...No, we all eat...
 - the same is true of brushing your teeth [let’s at least hope so]...everyone here brushes their teeth, please tell me you do [and for the sake of the dentists in our congregation— we also floss, everyday, religiously don’t we?...that’s probably pushing it]...
 - but you agree with the point – regardless of how many differences are represented here...there are certain things we all do...

- another item on that list is looking in the mirror...and I’m not talking about doing that in some inappropriate way...or lovingly gazing at ourselves all afternoon...
 - but occasionally, we all look in a mirror...you might not have one this big [podium mirror on the platform] --- but you have one, and you check it from time to time...
 - now let me ask you this question – what do you see?...who are you?...

- and when I ask you that, I’m really not asking, what do you physically see when you look in the mirror, I’m really asking, what do you see when you think of yourself?, or of your identity, and how you fit into the world of people around you?...
 - now I realize that you may push back and say, well, I don’t really think about myself...I think of God and others...frankly, that may or may not be true, and it may or may not be good...we’ll say more about that in a minute...
 - but even if I had to encourage you to take that step...what do you see...who are you?...

- now here’s complicating factor #1...
 - this isn’t just a matter of fact what you are...it’s a matter of how you interpret the facts...
 - in other words, your answers to the questions I just raised may be significantly skewed...
 - that’s because we all have an interpretive lens through which we view ourselves...
 - [that’s where the sunglasses come in...]...

- it’s not just the facts (what’s actually in the mirror), but the way you interpret the facts...
 - here’s the glasses some people wear...I’m the king of the world, I’m the most important person in the story, this movie is about me...
 - and so they wake up, and they slip those glasses on...and off they go...
 - and if their spouse and kids do everything they want...things are fine...because the king has been served...
 - but if not, there’s going to be anger...and or there’s going to be threats...or there’s going to be stomping around...
 - why?...in part, because the one who believes he’s the king has not been served...
 - he’s not been given center stage...What’s wrong with that?
 - he’s wearing the wrong color glasses...
 - he has a faulty answer to the question “who are you” and as a result his response to daily events is skewed as well...

- or there’s the person who wakes up and puts on the lens of “I’m a failure”, “I’m damaged goods”, “I’m dirty”, I’m soiled...”

- and so a temptation comes along – that person thinks, “what’s the use of trying to do right You’ll never change—who are you trying to kid?---you sinned before, you might as well sin again...”...
- we could tease this out dozens and dozens of ways...but I’d like you to think about how you would answer these questions...what do you see?...who are you?...
 - well, I’m a passive victim...My abuse defines my existence...
 - I’m better than most people...my nose deserved to be this high in the air...
 - I’m depressed...
 - I’m hopeless...
 - the possibilities are practically endless...
- now, here’s the point we want to make over the next seven weeks...the Word of God needs to be your interpretive grid...[let the scripture be your eye-glasses]
 - this isn’t some kind of psycho-babble...on practically every page of Scripture, God tells us something about the way He thinks of us, or the way He wants us to think about ourselves...
 - and the question is – are we going to let His grid become our grid?...
 - so, **Who are You, Coming to Grips with Our Identity in Christ...**
 - and this morning we want to focus on this area – **Ashamed or Forgiven?**
 - with that question in mind, please open your Bible to Zechariah chapter 3...page 671 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- now I realize that some of you are brand new to studying the Bible – in fact some may have come because a friend invited you and you might be thinking – oh, great – we’re going to study a book named Zechariah—why does this sound like something I could not possibly understand?...
- well, we do believe in studying the Word of God around here...in fact, just think about that phrase “Word of God”...if we really believe that’s the nature of the book we hold in our hands, who else’s word would we rather study?...
- it’s also true that understanding the Scripture takes some work...I’m not going to lie about that...
- but I always prepare these messages from the perspective of – could the main points be understood by a person who has never opened the Bible or set foot inside a church before...
- if that’s you this morning – take heart – you can get this...
- here’s the basic background of what we’re about to read...
 - this is very near the end of Old Testament history...
 - by now, the kingdom of Israel has divided in the northern tribes and the southern tribes...that took place in 931 BC...which was a very sad date in the history of God’s people...
 - then the northern kingdoms were conquered by Assyria in 722 BC...
 - that was followed by the southern kingdoms falling to Babylon in 586 BC...which began a period of captivity that lasted how many years?...70 years, just as the prophets had said...
 - Zechariah was a prophet who was ministering toward the end of that period of captivity...
- so now a group of Jewish men and women are being allowed to go back to Jerusalem...and one of their first desires is to rebuild the temple and reestablish the worship of their God...

- in this book, God allows Zechariah to see a series of visions...that is one of the ways God communicated truth to His people in those days...
- and now, chapter 3 contains the forth vision of Zechariah...
 - and interestingly enough, it is God's answer to the question, who are you?...
 - because many Jewish men and women would have wondered whether their sin had been so bad that they could never be forgiven and restored...
 - maybe God had completely given up on them...
 - maybe there was no way they could rebuild the temple or restore their system of worship...
 - their answer to the question, who are you, was – ashamed, because of our past failures and sins...
 - perhaps God wanted them to change their answer...

- read Zechariah 3:1-10...

- we asking today, are you Ashamed or Forgiven?...
- with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 perspectives on your guilt and shame.**
 - who you were, who you are, and who you'll be...

I. Who You Were – Ashamed.

- this vision God gives his servant could not have been more powerful...

A. Joshua's clothing.

- just to be clear the Joshua who is the focal point of this story is not the Joshua we typically think about, the man who led the children of Israel into the promised land after Moses died...that is who the book of Joshua is about...[that happened long before this]
- this Joshua was a priest...and the vision explains the shocking fact that Joshua is standing there in garments that are severely soiled...
- **Zechariah 3:3 – Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments...**
- we read that statement and think, well maybe he spilled something on them or needs to take them to the Laundromat...
- many Bible students believe that this word "filthy" is related to a Hebrew root word which refers to excrement, or perhaps vomit...
- and you might say – that's foul...that's the whole point...
- **John MacArthur – "Employing the most loathsome, vile term for filth, the phrase pictures the habitual condition of defilement of the priesthood and the people" (MacArthur Study Bible).**
- I don't see a lot of movies for a variety of reasons including my schedule, but I saw the movie Slum Dog Millionaire on an airplane coming back from a trip to a mission field some time back [I'm not recommending it by the way]...and if you saw that movie, you remember a scene early on where the main character's older brother locked him in an outhouse at the very moment some celebrity was landing in his helicopter
- and everyone wanted to see this celebrity so badly that the little boy realized there was only one way out of the outhouse...
- so the scene shows him holding his nose and down he goes... the only thing that survived was the picture of the actor he wanted to have autographed...
- and the next frame shows him running toward the crowd completely covered with filth and everybody just runs away because of the smell...
- and the only reason I would raise such a disgusting picture today is because that is what the author of Scripture does...the condition of their sin could not be any more repulsive...

- please notice this also about verse 3 – Joshua is standing before the angel...think about the contrast...
- many Bible students also believe this angel was the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person of the trinity...
 - we can't be dogmatic about that, but there are good reasons in this text to take that position...
 - regardless, the difference between the holy angel of the Lord and this priest who was utterly defiled could not be any more stark...
 - but that's not all there to the picture, is there...

B. Joshua's accuser.

- the text also says there was...**3:1 – Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.**
- I don't pretend to fully understand this, but the Scripture is clear that one of the favorite activities of our adversary is to shame the people of God...to point out our sin and our failures and our guilt...he loves to accuse us...he did that to Job...
- **Job 1:9-11 - Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."**
 - in other words, Job's faith is not real...and by implication – God, you're not powerful enough to give anyone genuine faith...our adversary loves conversations like that where he can heap shame and guilt on others...
 - that's why, by the way...it will be a happy day when this event occurs... **Revelation 12:10 - Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.**
- now again, I can't fully explain exactly how this dynamic plays out – but the main points are clear – this priest is wearing filthy garments and the adversary is having a great time pointing out all the failures of the people of God...and how they deserved the judgment they received at the hand of the Babylonians...and how there would never be a future for people like them...

- well, do we share Joshua's heritage?...are there any...

C. Our similarities.

- every last one of us deeply understands what it means to be ashamed...sometimes...

1. Ashamed for legitimate reasons.

- there are times when we are ashamed because we have behaved shamefully...
- that's why we often experience...

a. Guilt

- **Psalm 38:4-6 - For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long.**

b. Separation

- **Isaiah 59:2 - But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.**

c. Rebellion

- **Isaiah 1:5 - Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in *your* rebellion? The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint.**
- we can't say, we might have been filthy, but it was because someone else rubbed it on us...
- **Isaiah 53:6 - All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...**
- and we could develop that in plenty of other ways...there are all sorts of legitimate reasons why we might look in the mirror and be ashamed...but then there's also...

2. Ashamed for illegitimate reasons.

a. Beating ourselves up over past sins and failures even if we've asked forgiveness from God and others.

- some men and women are shame factories...
- that's what they see whenever they look in the mirror because they review their sins and failures over and over and over...or...

b. Taking to heart the false accusations of others.

- if our adversary loves to accuse the brethren...what do you think "The adversary's children" love to do...
- there are many men women who love to point out the failures of Christians, real or perceived...and want to do everything they can to shame the people of God...

- now, here's the point – that's where many of the people of God were at that time in Israel's history...feeling as if there was no future for them because of their past failures...
 - like they were standing there in spiritually soiled robes...
 - and the adversary was happy to keep up that charade as long as possible...
- and I wonder how many men and women still wear that particular kind of glasses?...
 - their shame is the lens through which they answer the question...who are you?...
 - and that can manifest itself in all sorts of ways...
 1. Some men and women are perpetually sad...and discouraged...or depressed...
 - because they define their existence through the lens of their failures...
 2. Other men and women are a flurry of activity and busyness...
 - because they believe they can overcome their failures by good deeds...
 - many times that's what leads to perfectionism, or a performance based relationship to God...
 3. Others shy away from building relationships because they don't want anyone to discover their secret...or their skeleton...
- friends, here's the message that comes screaming out of this passage...Ashamed does not have to be your answer to the question, who are you?...
- do you know what Zechariah's name means?...”the Lord remembers...”
- and that is significant in this passage because God had made unconditional promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David and other leaders of the nation of Israel...
- and yes his people had to be judged because of their disobedience...but the Lord remembers...
 - the Lord remembers His promises...and that means that Israel's sin was not the end of their story...

- for people like you and me...that's why what we celebrated last weekend was so significant...
- do you remember, just prior to going to the cross, Jesus celebrated the last supper with his disciples...and at a crucial moment He raised the cup signifying the blood He was about to shed for our sin, and He said -- **Luke 22:20 - And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood..."**
- and here's what that means...if you have never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord before, you can do that, even today, and experience for the first time spiritually, what happened to Joshua the priest physically...Being ashamed does not have to be the end of your story...
- Christian friend, if you have asked God and the appropriate people to forgive you for sins you've committed since becoming a Christian – it is wrong to continue to review those sins over and over...that's not the lens through which God wants you to view yourself...not just because of the damage it does to you, but to the damage it does to His name...
 - **1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**
 - **Psalm 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. [God remembers what He wants to remember...]**
- and Christian friend, if you've messed up and perhaps even had to face some of the consequences of your choices and are now wondering – is there any way to get back on track [that's exactly where the children of Israel found themselves) – this text answers that question very clearly...the perspective through which God wants you to view yourself is the lens of forgiveness...

II. Who You Are – Forgiven

- it's very important to note that it's not Zechariah the prophet who speaks to Satan, or Joshua the priest...it's...

A. The Lord's rebuke

- **Zechariah 3:2 - ...The Lord said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan!..."**
- that's why, incidentally, you don't hear us directly rebuking Satan around here in various contexts...we leave that to the Lord...
- that's issue actually comes up in the NT -- **Jude 9 - But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"**
- that's what we see in this text – these accusations as if there was no future for God's chosen people was an affront to God Himself and the covenants He had made with His people...there's also...

B. The Lord's rescue

- **Zechariah 3:2 - ...Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"**
- there are two crucial ideas there...

1. God chose you.

- **John 15:16 - You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.**
- when you view yourself through the lens of the forgiveness you enjoy through the finished work of Christ...you are confirming the power of God to fulfill His divine plan for His church...

2. You were like “a brand plucked from the fire.”

- when we view ourselves through the lens of forgiveness, the net effect isn't to congratulate ourselves...it is to marvel at the wonderful grace of God...
- and that's one of the things I love about this church...because of the emphasis on community based outreach ministry, and having a counseling ministry where biblical answers are available to people who are hurting...there are all sorts of people who would say...that's me...I was ruining my life, I was like a branch in the fire big time...
 - then Jesus rescued me...and I love viewing myself not through the lens of my sins and my failures...I love thinking about myself as a scorched but forgiven brand plucked from the fire by the merciful hand of God...

C. The Lord's cleansing.

- **Zechariah 3:4 - He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.”**
- can you imagine the effect that would have had on the nation of Israel...
- you've messed up...and you've been disciplined...but forgiveness is available...

D. The Lord's provision.

- you might have wondered---what was up with that turban?...
- **Zechariah 3:5 - Then 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, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.**
- why is that important?...you just have to go back to the OT to read about the priest's turban...do you know what was written on it?...
- **Exodus 28:36 - You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, ‘Holy to the LORD.’**
- **2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**
- see, ultimately the question is – what color glasses is God wearing when He looks at His children?...perhaps the best answer is – red and white – red because he sees His children forgiven by the blood of Christ, and white because He sees us clothed in the righteousness of His Son...
- that should be one of the essential answers to the question Who Are You?...
 - and when you think about yourself that way – it doesn't fill your heart with pride...it fills with thanksgiving because of the amazing grace of God...

- now, it is very important to note the sequence...there's also...

E. The Lord's command.

- **Zechariah 3:7 - Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing here.**
- forgiven people want to serve the Lord not to earn their forgiveness, but because of their forgiveness...[cf. woman taken in adultery – nor do I condemn you...go and sin no more...]

F. The Lord's Servant

- everything we've discussed today is based on the finished work of Christ...

- Zechariah 3:8-9 - ...for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. [The Messianic references take your breath away.]
- the words servant, and branch, and stone are all dripping with Messianic imagery...

G. This justifies the Lord's rebuke of our accusers (and our own misplaced self-accusations).

- justification is a fact based on the finished work of Christ...
- Isaiah 50:8-9 - He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; The moth will eat them.
- Romans 8:33-34 - Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
- Isaiah 61:10 - I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

[- cf. Luther's ink blot -- Kaiser – pp. 330-331]

III. Who You'll Be

- the day will come when all of this will become a finished reality...
- Revelation 19:7-8 - "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.