In a Single Day

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

For our Midweek Lent services this year, we've been listening and learning from God's Old Testament Prophet Zechariah. He's normally grouped with the "Minor" Prophets simply because the amount they wrote was much less than the "Major" Prophets, like Isaiah or Jeremiah. Truly there's nothing minor or insignificant about the words God the Holy Spirit led Zechariah to write. In fact, in these words, we're given some of the clearest foreshadowing of the events of Holy Week – nearly 500 years before they actually happened!

Zechariah ministered to God's people in Jerusalem after they had returned from 70 years in captivity in Babylon. Rebuilding the Temple and the city was priority #1, but Satan distracted God's people's and caused their attention turned inward, taking care of themselves and their own homes. Together with the High Priest Joshua, Zechariah called the people to repent and return to the Lord. Above all, they were to prepare their hearts for their true King, the coming Messiah.

Satan had a secondary plan of attack. He didn't just go after the people – he went after the leaders, especially Joshuah, the High Priest – which is recorded in Chapter 3. Yet as the Lord so often does, he turns these moments from spiritual attack – into spiritual promise and prophecy. As we hear these words, we'll see the devil in his role of prosecutor, launching accusations in God's supreme court– yet he is outdone for the Lord was on Joshua's side, and the charges are dismissed. And it's in the midst of this exchange that Lord shares with the world – what Good Friday would be all about. Listen to this dramatic account recorded in Zechariah 3:1-10.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."

Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in obedience to me and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

"'Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in ***a single day.*** *In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."*

I. He Gives You New Clothes

Joshua was the high priest, but he was still human – and that gave Satan plenty of material to draw on. He could dredge up foolishness from Joshua's boyhood; no doubt there was lingering guilt over adolescent actions; what about mistakes made as Israel's religious leader, and then there were those sinful, selfish thoughts that lurked in the heart of this man who appeared so holy – all dressed in his priestly robes? Joshua, just like you and me, had a rap sheet that gave the accuser plenty to work with.

None of that was unknown to the Lord - or to Joshua. Joshua may have been the highest spiritual figure in Judaism, but his conscience could not conceal his personal sins. As part of his daily tasks, each priest had to offer sacrifices for their 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! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"* The Lord had chosen Jerusalem, signifying all the Jewish people, including Joshua, 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, declares the Lord!"

Picture yourself in that courtroom. The holy judge, seated high above, 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 Satan himself, and he's got a ton of evidence stacked against you.

The truth is, Satan *owned* us. All his accusations could stick, because they are all true. "Look at the evidence, Judge! So many can testify how they have been hurt by the defendant's selfish actions. Listen to the audio of the defendant's 'colorful' language. How about this catalogue of all the times they prioritized time and resources and skills for their own personal desires – instead of employing them according to your Will and for the good of Your Kingdom? 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 in order for you to slam that gavel down with a "Guilty" verdict.

Our text says, "Now Joshua was dressed in *filthy* clothes as he stood before the angel." In the Hebrew, that word could be applied to a baby's diaper. How disgusting his clothes were, especially for one standing in the Lord's presence! Yet, do our garments don't look—or smell—any better? We deserve that guilty verdict, each one of us deserves to be discarded as a dirty diaper. We deserve to be that stick that stokes hell's flames.

Yet the Lord says that we, burning sticks, have been snatched from the fire, just like Joshua. The Lord who chose Jerusalem - has also chosen you. Jesus raced into the fire of hell on Good Friday to rescue you from eternal destruction. And what of those filthy clothes? The Lord has plans for that too.

The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by. With "Fine garments" and "A clean turban" covering Joshua there's nothing left for the accuser to accuse? This formerly filthy felon now looks like a dignified high priest. Most importantly, he is declared holy—so holy that he can stand before the Holy Judge without fear!

As for those old filthy clothes, Jesus himself wore them… and took them to the cross. And, in exchange, Jesus dresses you in his own spotless garments! These are now your new wardrobe! The prosecutor's charges are dismissed. Isaiah describes this spiritual makeover in these words: *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.* (Isaiah 61:10)

Zechariah has more good news for us. *"'Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin 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 their priestly robes. They interceded with the Lord for the people, picturing the work of the Savior. They sacrificed countless lambs, foreshadowing the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice would fulfill and end all sacrifices.

Jesus, who is also called the Branch from Jesse's tree, will grow into a large plant in which all 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 servant and Savior. Interesting how Pilate's inscribed sign identified the crucified victim as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Here's the Goal and the incredible Good Friday connection: God says through the Prophet Zechariah, "*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 right there is the "good" of Good Friday – the highest good there is, because every person's - every 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!

II. He Gives You a New Home

When Adam and Eve violated God's holy law, they lost their garden home. 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, with all his charges, lost that argument too. *The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in obedience to me and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.'"*

God's first requirement 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). Not just on Good Friday, but every Sunday, I am obligated to faithfully announce God's grace-filled gift: forgiveness for all sins, for all sinners, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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 those standing before the Lord.

You and I are being watched by our Savior. That is both a warning and a comfort. The Lord says: *"'See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."*

The pages of Scripture show us these engraved inscriptions that identifies Him: the Cornerstone, the Lamb of God, the Rock of our Salvation, the Resurrection and the Life. The seven 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 will sit under our vine and fig tree in perfect peace, where we will eat from the tree of life and live forever.

You and I get to extend that invitation now. Let your neighbor know the true "Good" that is found under the cross of Christ: the free and full forgiveness. Let them know of the abundant fruit that comes from Christ, the vine. Share with them the cooling shade and protection Christ gives from the hot, harsh, hostile world.

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