

Clean Clothes

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[0 : 00] Well, it would be great if you could open your Bibles to Zechariah, Chapter 3. It's page 949, 949 in your Bibles.

For those who have been with us for the last few weeks, we've been working our way through the book of Zechariah. And today we come to Chapter 3. Well, I knew Michelle was the one.

And so I took her parents out to dinner one night to ask for their permission to marry her. I took them to their favourite restaurant and they ordered their favourite meals.

And just when I was about to ask permission, I was quite nervous, you see. I dropped some food down the front of me. Now, at that particular point, I hadn't actually spoken and they had their heads down eating.

So they didn't notice. I'd managed to get away with it thus far. But it was at the bottom of my shirt. And so I kind of just slid down the seat a little bit so that the table would cover it. I didn't want them thinking, if this guy can't even eat food properly, how's he going to look after my daughter?

[1 : 12] And so I kind of covered it up. And as soon as I was able to put my jacket over my shirt to hide the stain. And thankfully, the meal worked. They gave me permission and were married.

I was going to say how many years ago, but I've forgotten. Anyway, the point is, everyone knows that having dirty clothes is not good social etiquette, is it?

If you spill something, it's embarrassing. And if you have dirty clothes and you're going out somewhere, then you get changed first, don't you? And you put on clean clothes, especially if you're going to be meeting someone important.

And as we come to Zechariah chapter 3 today, Joshua the high priest is in trouble because he has filthy clothes. So we're at point 1, verse 1.

Then he, that is the angel that was with Zechariah, showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

[2 : 14] Why? Well, verse 3, Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. Now, this is actually a huge problem.

But before we consider why, let me remind you of what's been happening. Back in chapter 1, verse 7, we are told that it's the 24th day of the 11th month. And on this night, verse 8 of chapter 1, Zechariah is given a vision.

The word of the Lord comes to Zechariah in a vision at nighttime. And this vision goes on for a number of chapters. In fact, it's got eight parts to it. Must have been a long night for Zechariah. And at this particular point in chapter 3, we're up to the fourth part of the vision.

And Zechariah sees this high priest called Joshua. Now, let me say Joshua was a real person in that time of history. He came back from exile with the first group of Jews who came back.

And he was the actual high priest of the day. But Zechariah sees him in this vision in what is like a heavenly courtroom scene. Do you see verse 1 again?

[3 : 25] Joshua is standing before the angel of the Lord who represents God the judge. And beside Joshua is Satan, whose name literally means the accuser. Or the prosecutor. And Satan is ready to prosecute Joshua.

Why? Well, because of verse 3. Because he has filthy clothes. But why is this such a huge problem? Is it just bad social etiquette? Well, no.

Rather, these filthy clothes represent Joshua's sin. As we'll see in a moment in verse 4. And so these filthy clothes make Joshua unacceptable to God. And that means he cannot do his job as high priest.

You see, the high priest was the go-between, the mediator between God and people. And the high priest would appear on people's behalf and offer sacrifices to God to make atonement for their sins.

But because he entered into God's presence, he had to be pure. He had to be clean. He had to be holy. Let me show you from Leviticus chapter 10. So stick your outline or something in Zechariah. [4 : 31] We're going to come back there in a moment. But I just need to show you the background to this so you understand why filthy clothes is such a huge issue. So come back to Leviticus chapter 10.

Leviticus is the third book of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. It's page 107. So Leviticus chapter 10.

Here we read in verses 1 to 3. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, took their senses, put fire in them and added incense.

And they offered unauthorized fire or sacrifice before the Lord, contrary to God's command. And so fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them.

And they died before the Lord. Moses then said to Aaron, this is what the Lord spoke of when he said, Among those who approach me, I will be proved holy. In the sight of all the people, I will be honored.

[5 : 37] And Aaron remained silent. Aaron's sons were priests as well. But they offered a sacrifice to God contrary to how God commanded.

And the point that Moses makes here is it matters how we approach God. We cannot approach God any old way. It needs to be on God's terms, not our terms.

And this is especially so for the priests who were the ones who drew near to God into his presence. In fact, verse 3 literally says, Among those who draw near, I will be proved holy.

Now, by the way, when we read this, we might think that God is overacting a little here, mightn't we? I mean, killing these priests simply because they didn't approach him in the right way.

But if we think that, I wonder if it's because we've underestimated God's holiness. I wonder if it's because we've forgotten how awesome, in the true sense of the word, God is.

[6 : 40] How perfect, how holy he is. I mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago that we're going through a phase with one of our daughters who thinks they're the boss and likes to tell us what to do.

And it shows it in the way they kind of answer back. In fact, just last week, I pointed out that they would never speak to their teacher the way they speak to us. And she replied with, well, you're only my dad.

Thanks. In her eyes, her teacher was more important, more worthy of respect than her parents who brought her into the world, who changed her nappies, who fed her. I went on for a while longer.

In other words, she underestimated who we were as her parents. And so she didn't treat us rightly. And it's the same here with God. Aaron's sons underestimate who God is.

His holiness, his glory. And so they do not approach him rightly. And so how was the high priest to approach God? Well, God had already given some instructions about this, but he gives some more in chapter 16 of Leviticus.

[7 : 42] So just flick forward a few pages to chapter 16. Page 115. And as I read this, notice that one of the things the priest needs is clean clothes.

So chapter 16, verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of his two sons of Aaron, which we just heard about, who died when they approached the Lord.

And the Lord said to Moses, tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the most holy place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die.

For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. And so this is how Aaron is to enter the most holy place where God's presence was. He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

He is to put on sacred linen tunic with linen undergarments next to his body. He is to tie a linen sash around him and put on a linen turban on his head.

[8 : 48] These are sacred garments, the clean clothes. So he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. And from the Israelite community, he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

And on it goes. Now, just so you can understand what's going on here, you remember that the tabernacle was a tent, which was God's temple. It was a mobile temple.

And on the next slide, I've got a picture or drawing of it. That's what it was like. And in the middle there, towards the top right-hand corner, there was different sections. So on the next slide is a bird's eye view.

It's kind of the other way around now. But on your far left, that's the most holy place. And then you've got this veil or the curtain. And then you've got the holy place. And in the most holy place, that's where God dwelt.

That's why it's the most holy place. And there was the ark, which was on the next slide, a golden box. And the lid of it was called the atonement cover.

[9 : 50] Because that's where Aaron would sprinkle blood to atone for the people's sins. That's where God's presence would appear in that cloud that we just read about. By the way, if you're not sure what the word atonement means, you just need to break up the word like that on the slide.

It just means at-one-ment. To make atonement means to bring two groups together as one. To be at peace, at-one-ment. So for example, if I did something to Michelle, like I forgot our anniversary one year, this is completely hypothetical, right?

I would be in the wrong. And so to make up for it or to atone for it, I might buy some flowers. And if she was rightly angry, which she wasn't actually, but I mean, it's hypothetical.

But if she was angry, then the flowers might turn away her bright anger and we'd be at peace again. We'd be at-one-ment again. That's atonement. But because sin is serious and God is holy, then flowers don't cut it.

In fact, the payment for sin is death. And so blood was used to make atonement. That's what we heard about in our second reading, where it said, in fact, the law requires that nearly everything be sprinkled with blood for the forgiveness of sins.

[11 : 06] And we see this in Leviticus 16. So hopefully you've still got that there. Turn over the page to verse 15. Last Bible flick before we head back to Zechariah. So the middle of the left-hand column there, and this is what we read in verse 15.

He, that is Aaron, shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take the blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood. He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover.

That's the lid of that golden box. And in front of it. And in this way, he'll make atonement for the most holy place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.

And he is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them and in their midst. In the midst of their uncleanness. No one is to be in the tent of meeting from the time that Aaron goes in to make atonement in the most holy place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole community of Israel.

You see, blood was the thing that made atonement for people's sins. God is so holy and sin is so serious that's what it required. It needed that so God could continue to dwell amongst them in the tabernacle.

[12 : 24] But you see, before Aaron enters that most holy place, he had to do certain things, remember? He had to have a bath and he had to put on those sacred garments and that turban on his head.

Why? Well, because God is holy and he cannot be approached any old way. Rather, the priest must treat God as holy by making himself clean and holy.

Now, with all that in mind, do you see how much of a problem it is for Joshua the high priest to have filthy clothes? He cannot approach God like that. If Aaron's sons died because they approached God the wrong way, then what do you think is going to happen with Joshua with his filthy clothes? The Jews are just back from exile. They're rebuilding the temple. But because Joshua has filthy clothes, because he is sinful and unholy, he cannot come into God's presence. He cannot offer a sacrifice of atonement for the people.

And so not only is the high priest in trouble, but so are the people. They can't be atoned for. And so God cannot dwell with them. And so in the end, this temple is pointless if God cannot dwell with his people.

[13 : 34] Do you see how much of a huge problem these filthy clothes are? It's a problem not just for Joshua, but for the people as well. And so come back with me to Zechariah chapter 3 and let's see God's solution to this problem.

See, God is determined to dwell with his people. And so he's determined to give them a high priest who can make atonement for them. So we're at point 2, verse 2. So Satan is ready to accuse Joshua.

And then verse 2, The Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this man Joshua a burning stick snatched from the fire?

You see, the angel of the Lord, who is God's representative, simply says to Satan in our courtroom scene, Too bad, Satan. You can't have him. God has plucked Joshua from the fire of judgment.

God is determined to have a high priest for his people, to make atonement for the people so that God can dwell with them. And so verse 4, The angel said to those who were standing before him, Take off Joshua's filthy clothes.

[14:40] Then he said to Joshua, See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you. Like we saw in Leviticus 16, those sacred garments. Then I said, Put a clean turban on his head.

And so they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him while the angel of the Lord stood by. And 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, the temple, and have charge over my courts.

And I will give you a place among these standing here. Do you see what happens to Joshua? Joshua, his filthy clothes are taken away. And he's given clean clothes, a turban, just like we saw with Aaron in Leviticus 16.

In other words, God takes away his sin and makes Joshua acceptable to him. And so now Joshua can be the people's priest. Now he can make atonement for the people.

And now God can dwell with them. But there is another problem here. How can God just simply do that? I mean, Joshua is clearly guilty.

[15:49] He has filthy clothes on. So how can God simply say to Satan, the prosecutor, too bad, mate. Yeah, you're right. He's guilty, but too bad. I'm plucking him from the fire of judgment.

I'm going to give him clean clothes and I'm going to send him on his way, forgiven. How can God do that? How is that just? How's that fair? I mean, can you imagine a judge in our law courts today saying that?

You know, the prosecutor says, your honour, Mr. So-and-so is guilty of murder. Look at exhibit A. There's the bloodstained clothes. He's got his filthy clothes that prove he's guilty. And then the judge says, yeah, yeah, that's true, but too bad.

I'm letting him go free. I'll give him clean clothes to walk out with as well. Can you imagine what would happen if the Melbourne Supreme Court judge did that? Imagine what the newspapers would say.

Gross miscarriage of justice. Where is the justice? And so on. And so how can God simply give Joshua clean clothes? Well, it's hinted at in the last few verses, which brings us to point three in verse eight.

[16:53] You see, what happens to Joshua and his fellow priests is symbolic of something else to come. See verse eight. 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've set in front of Joshua. There are seven eyes or seven sides 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. I hear God says that what happened to Joshua is symbolic of what will happen later on.

In fact, what will happen for the whole land, that sin will be removed. And it will happen by the sending of another servant, a guy called the branch. And through this person called the branch, God will somehow remove the sins of not just Joshua, but the whole land in a single day.

In fact, so sure of this promise is God that he engraves it on a stone, which is probably like a gemstone. You know how the diamonds or gemstones have different facets or different sides? The word eyes there can mean different facets.

[18:05] And he inscribes it on this stone, this promise that he will remove the sin of this land in a single day. Now the sins are going to be wiped clean, clean clothes for everyone.

And God is going to do this through his servant, the branch. And then the people will be able to enjoy God and his blessings. In fact, they will even be able to invite others to enjoy the blessings as well.

Do you see verse 10? In that day, when God does this, each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree, declares the Lord Almighty.

In the Old Testament, the vine and the fig tree were a picture of peace and contentment. But in that day, it will be enjoyed not just by God's people, but by their neighbors as well. In fact, at the end of chapter 2 in verse 11, that last vision we saw last week, it says that in that day, some of the nations will join God's people.

And here we read, in that day, the day that God wipes away sins, other people will join God's people together and they'll enjoy God's blessings together under the vine and fig tree.

[19 : 12] Yet God will do this all through his servant, the branch. And so the question is, who is this branch then? Someone said Jesus. Yes, it's Jesus. You see, by Zechariah's day, it was another name for God's promised king called the Christ.

The Christ would come from David's line. Let me quickly show you a couple of references on the screen. So the next slide from Jeremiah. In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line, King David's line.

He's got to be a descendant of King David. He will do what is just and right in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety under the vine and fig tree.

On the next slide in Isaiah 4, in that day, the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.

You see, there's prosperity with this branch and those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, clean clothes, forgiven. You see, although God is more holy than we realize, and although we are more sinful than, well, we like to admit, God is still determined to be our God and to enable us to draw to him as his people.

[20 : 28] God is still determined to enable us to enjoy his blessings of peace and provision. And so he brings his servant, the branch, to make it possible. And of course, that servant is none other than Jesus, descended from King David.

Jesus, the Christ, the branch, comes to earth. And it's through Jesus and his death on the cross that God deals with the sin of the world in a single day.

As we heard from our second reading, it is Jesus who becomes our high priest, who makes atonement for our sin. And so it is through Jesus and his death on the cross that God can pluck you and me from the fire of judgment.

You see, Satan has every right to stand beside us and accuse us of being guilty. And he would be right. Yet through Jesus and his death on the cross, God can pluck us from judgment.

He can forgive us our sins and he can remain just because someone does pay for our sin.

Someone's blood is shed for our atonement. And of course, it's Christ.

[21 : 36] On the next slide is a verse that we often read out after we confess our sins at church. It says this. Notice the language of the courtroom scene. If anyone does sin, we have one who speaks or an advocate who speaks to the Father in our defense.

Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. So what does all this mean for us then?

Well, it reminds us of three quick things. Firstly, it reminds us that God is holy. We cannot underestimate how holy God is. And so we cannot approach him any way we like.

Rather, we have to approach him on his terms because like Joshua, we too have filthy clothes. We are sinful. And the way we are to approach God, the terms that he has set, is by trusting in Jesus, his son.

And so if you want to be right with God, the only way to be right, to come to God, is through Jesus, our high priest, our sacrifice. The second thing that this vision reminds us though is that God loves us.

[22 : 49] He is determined to provide a way for us to come to him, isn't he? To enjoy his blessings of peace and contentment in this life and abundant provision in the next.

He is determined to give his people clean clothes as he does for Joshua, even if the lights go out and come back on. Even if it costs him though the blood of his only son.

God is determined to do that for us. Why? Because he loves us. And so lastly, this vision reminds us that we can be free from guilt and shame to serve God.

You see, Satan may accuse us of being sinful and he would be right. But as we heard from our second reading and on the next slide, how much more then will the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God?

See, we've been freed to serve God. If we take a good look at ourselves, we realize that we're not perfect. And whether we're Christian or not, we still sin. And that could become rather depressing, especially if we're trying to live a life that pleases God.

[23 : 53] You know, it could become all too hard being a Christian because, oh man, I just mess up again. What's the point in trying? I started teaching myself guitar. I started 15 years ago. I'm still no good.

And several times I just think, what's the point in trying? You know, I never have time to practice and even when I do, I haven't got much better. I still mess up. So what's the point?

It's all just too hard. Now the Christian life could have been like that. It could have been all too hard to live for Jesus because we do keep messing up.

But the Christian life is not like that because God continues to wash our filthy clothes, to cleanse our consciences from guilt and shame.

And so we don't have to get depressed that we keep messing up. Instead, it can be motivated to keep trying, knowing that God will forgive us. That even if Satan has every right to prosecute us, Christ's blood will wash us clean.

[24 : 55] That's comforting news. Is it not? In fact, it's such good news that we cannot keep it to ourselves but we are to invite our neighbours to share in God's blessings through Christ.

It ought to remind us that we are free from guilt and shame and encourage us to keep serving the living God. Let me close with the words of a hymn that we're going to sing in a moment actually.

It was written by Charity Bancroft who understood Zechariah 3. She writes, When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, prosecutes me, well, upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.

They are great words which ought to keep warming our hearts and encouraging us to live for our amazing God who loved us so. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this message of Zechariah 3.

[26 : 15] That you are a God who loves us and is determined to give us clean clothes, to give us forgiveness, that we may be with you and enjoy your blessings both in this life and the life to come.

Father, we pray that you would help us to never tire of hearing this great news. We pray that you would help us to rejoice in it and to share it with others we meet.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.