

Zechariah 3 "Hope for Despairing Sinners"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I'm warning you, I'm going to cry this morning. I'm not 100% sure why, but fair warning. I don't always give you a warning on that. I don't know what's coming. This morning we're going to turn to the book of Zechariah.

Now, it's near the very end of the Old Testament, right before you hit Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The story in chapter 3 is actually a vision that God gives this prophet.

A vision that in a really glorious way tells the whole gospel. The good news of this redeeming God we've been talking about this summer in the Old Testament.

And a gracious Savior that He's sending. Let's read this vision in Zechariah 3 all the way through.

And then I'll give you some context as we consider it together.

[1 : 06] This is God's holy word. In a world where people often tell you what you want to hear. The only constant source of truth.

In a world where things are constantly changing. The only thing you can count on to stay the same. In a world that's full of cynicism.

The one thing that always, always offers hope. Let's listen. Zechariah 3 verse 1. Then He showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

And the Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?

Now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, Remove the filthy garments from him.

[2 : 14] And to him he said, Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments. And 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. And the angel of the Lord was standing by. And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured Joshua, Thus says the Lord of hosts, If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts.

And I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign.

Behold, I will bring my servant, the branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts.

And I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.

[3 : 23] This is God's word. Let's pray and ask for his help. Father, you've been so kind to us.

And we ask again this morning that we would experience your kindness and grace in yet another way, that you would take this word and that you would write its truth on our hearts.

We know your word is true. We need it to penetrate our hearts, to redirect us, to shape us, to help us believe the truth and have that be life-changing to us forever.

You love to do that by your spirit. So would you work, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. In case, like me, you're not a Zechariah scholar, let me tell you a bit of the story of God's people up to this point so that we'll understand where we are when this vision comes in.

God's people are created to reflect his image, right? To fill the earth with his glory. In fact, Israel in particular has been called especially to have this special close relationship with God where they trust him, where they follow his laws and they share his goodness with everyone as a light to the

nations.

[4 : 51] That's who they're to be. But instead, they have over and over, generation after generation, wandered after other gods in repeated idolatry.

So eventually, in an effort to bring their hearts back to him, God has raised up the Assyrians and the Babylonians, these foreign nations who don't know him, to take his people into exile away from the promised land.

And they've spent decades suffering under foreign domination, cruel oppression. But now, some of them have been brought back to the promised land to make Jerusalem great again.

And they've begun to work to rebuild the city and the temple where the presence of God dwells among them. And hopes are high. There's excitement. Visions of promised greatness return.

We'll be God's people in God's land and everything will be the way it's supposed to be. But those hopes have started fading pretty quickly.

[6 : 06] When Zechariah shows up, Jerusalem is far from its former glory. The walls of the city and the temple are incomplete.

Opposition has been strong. Taxes have been high from foreign nations and their influence in the world is low. Light to the nations.

They're just trying to keep some light on at all. God's people, discouraged by the progress they see. They're ready to despair of that hope of former glory, have left off the work of rebuilding God's city and God's temple.

They've begun to focus on their own homes rather than God's house. They're just seeking to make life as good as they can for themselves.

[7 : 03] Nothing better could happen. Maybe you can relate to feelings like that. High hopes about God. And then disappointment.

Maybe even spiritual discouragement. And you're ready to give up. Perhaps to give up on great things for God and just kind of get by with what you can get for yourself.

Maybe that's where you are. Or maybe you're just ready to give up altogether on any true success. Yes. Maybe you're on your second marriage or a fresh start on your first marriage and you've committed to saying this won't be like it used to be.

Those same problems won't happen again. And they're back. And this time you're blaming yourself. Maybe you look at your church and her weaknesses are more obvious to you than her strengths and you're pretty sure it's never going to change.

Maybe you battle feelings, desires in your heart that you don't understand or like. But God doesn't seem to be taking them away and you feel like He never will.

[8 : 30] Maybe you promised yourself never to fall into that sin again. And yet the addiction to the bottle or the images on the computer screen has reared its ugly head again.

And you're pretty sure it's never going to go away. Is God even real? Why has nothing changed? It's easy to get discouraged and even to lose hope, isn't it?

Well, it seems pretty hopeless for God's people at the beginning of Zechariah's vision too. Just look at verse 1. Joshua, the high priest, remember what's the priest's job?

The priest is a representative of God's people before him, right? So the priest, representing all God's people, is standing there before the angel of the Lord, representing Yahweh Himself, God's people, standing before their God.

And then in verse 3, we read that he's clothed with filthy garments. You may not even know exactly what that means, but it's not good, is it?

[9 : 44] That's not the way God's people ought to be before God. But it's not just how dirty the high priest is, but how disqualified he is.

For a priest to be covered in filth disqualifies him from his calling. To stand and serve in God's presence, it's not allowed. Imagine you're invited to a formal black tie only event.

And so you get all cleaned up in your tuxedo, and it's a fancy evening, and here you go, and you're driving down the highway, and along the side of the road, you notice a man in an orange jumpsuit working in the hot sun along the highway picking up trash.

Now you can't pick this inmate up and take him to the black tie event because he's dirty, right? And you just got your car cleaned, and you really don't want him in there messing up your nice car and suit.

But it's more than that, isn't it? It's not just that he's sweaty and muddy. You can't pick him up and drive off anywhere with him because he's disqualified as a convict from leaving, from getting in your car, and certainly from going to a black tie event.

[11 : 09] We'll come back to the orange jumpsuit and black tie in a minute. But it's actually God's people. You and me in the orange jumpsuit, right?

We're not the ones in the tux driving the car here in this story. God's people are guilty of repeated idolatry, disqualified from being with God.

And it gets worse. Who stands there to point out the awful reality of the situation but Satan himself whose very name means accuser and he is attacking God's people passionately, viciously.

It's what he does. And I mean, after all, they're pretty easy to accuse. Aren't we? Satan highlights our awful failures.

Reminds us how undeserving we are and those things may be true but then as he always does, he subtly lies to us about God in the midst of that.

[12 : 25] He tells us all sorts of things. We tend to believe the lies mixed in with the truth that he tells to us. Here's what it sounds like.

I know a bit of what the accuser says because just in recent weeks he's said these things I'm about to tell you to one of you or to me personally.

Things like you've blown it too badly to be really loved or valued again. Your marriage will never be like hers anyway so why bother?

How could God use you to share about him with someone else when you battle doubts yourself?

You've lost your zeal for God just coast through like everyone else it'll never be any better.

You messed up your own kid how could you ever be used to love someone else? You're such a failure that you do the big sins even after you promise you won't again.

[13 : 34] No one can help someone as messed up as you are. Don't even ask God for his help before you can show that you really mean it that he's not just wasting his time on you. Get it together and then come ask him to help out.

God. And we tend to believe these lies. The hopelessness discouragement even despair creeps in. If you've ever heard one of these lies in your own head if you've ever believed something like that in your own heart I want you to listen to what God really says.

This passage is going to set some of those lies straight and I want you to hear the truth from God's word. Verse 2 for example the Lord says to Satan as he accuses the Lord rebuke you oh Satan the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you.

Is not this a brand plucked from the fire? Stop it! You think God is angry? Yes he is.

[14 : 46] Angry with Satan. He's rebuking him. The Lord rebuke you Satan. Don't you talk about my kids that way.

God says I will decide whom I will love and treasure and use and I chose them.

I brought them back again from exile. I plucked them from the fire and am holding them forth as a light to the nations. Don't you dare tell them they should give up hope.

I am for them. They are mine and I haven't given up on them. Y'all listen. We must believe the greater story that God tells when the lies of Satan come at us.

Think about it. Who are we to tell God that his love for us is too deep? Who are we to tell God that his plans for us are too great?

[15 : 58] Who are we to tell God that his hope for us is too firm? Hear the good news. Our God forgives and restores repeat offenders, terrible ones, undeserving sinners, and dysfunctional churches.

He doesn't give up on them. He loves them. Did you hear that? He doesn't give up on them.

Don't you believe that lie? That you're too bad? That you're too far gone? That you could never be used or loved certainly not by God on the authority of God's word?

It's a lie. And God wants you to know the truth of how he feels. He loves you. Undeserving sinner, repeat idolater who keeps chasing after the thing that God's told you not to, he calls you back again because he loves you and he hasn't given up.

Look at what God does in this passage so his children get a picture of the love and the hope that he has for them. Verse four, the angel said to those standing before him, remove the filthy garments from him.

[17 : 22] And to him, the high priest, he said, behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you and I will clothe you with pure vestments. and I said, let them put a clean turban on his head.

So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed them with garments and the angel of the Lord is standing by over all of this. It's a change of clothes full of significance.

Old clothes gone, new clothes on, and both of those are so important. There's a theological term for what's going on here that I want you to know, not just so you can win points at trivia night or something like that, but because it makes a practical difference in your lives.

The term is double imputation. What in the world is double imputation? Double imputation means that something is credited like to an account, a credit to an account.

It's imputed, credited in two directions. Our sin credited to Jesus and Jesus' righteousness credited to us.

[18 : 40] Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians. For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin.

That's Jesus, right? God made the one without sin to become sin for us. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

So that what? So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Might be those to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.

Romans chapter 4. Now in terms of the orange jumpsuit, if you are in the orange jumpsuit on the highway, you can't go into the formal black tie event, right?

It's not happening. But it takes more than someone just taking the orange jumpsuit off of you and leaving you out there on the highway in a sweaty t-shirt and athletic shorts, right?

[19 : 44] That's not actually enough. That may hide your biggest mistakes. your big sins, maybe you're not visible as guilty anymore. They get taken away but there you are left out all on your own, right?

You still can't go to the big event. You can't enter that formal without a tux. You need new clothes too. Not just the old ones gone but new ones given to you.

Somebody must give you a tux. And that's exactly what God does for his priest in this vision.

Removes the dirty clothes and brings the new white ones out.

The only way he's allowed to stand and serve in God's presence again, double imputation. You remember that? Or at least you remember what happens.

You're not standing out on the highway stranded all by yourself just relieved of your sins but on your own from this point. No, you're dressed in these sparkingly clean garments of Jesus' righteousness and ushered right into God's presence.

[20 : 59] Remember, it's God who does both of those things. What does he say? I have taken away and I will clothe.

We tend to look hope in ourselves hope in ourselves. Why do we despair? Because we look in ourselves and when we get honest enough, we get discouraged and think there's nothing to hope in here.

God says to you this morning, the only place you can find hope is in his gracious mercy. He does the cleansing. See, that's how we know we don't have to clean ourselves up before we come to God because God does the cleansing.

It's his job. He loves it. You can't take that from him. He's the one who does the cleansing. You have to come dirty to him and he washes you clean. And that continues to be true in your relationship with God.

For those of you who have known him, who he has washed clean, that's how you keep relating to him. You don't have to fix yourself before he can use you. He does that.

[22 : 11] double imputation. I'm forgiven and I'm righteous. Radiant. Maybe kids, you can think about the picture of Cinderella.

Have you seen the movie? Like the old one with cartoons in it. Cinderella there, as she's getting ready to go to the ball and then what happens with her stepsisters, what do they do?

They tear her dress and there she is, Cinderella left in shreds with just rags hanging off of her, right? And she's crying and despairing.

Why? Because you can't go to the ball dressed like that. And she can't fix herself. But the fairy godmother knows what to do, right?

She comes and those rags are quickly replaced by a beautiful gown that she gets to go meet the prince in. Maybe that's what some of you feel like today.

[23 : 19] Have you been torn apart by others and left damaged? You feel despair in that?

You want to give up on yourself? On God? Maybe you just wouldn't say it that way. God doesn't want to give up on you.

He doesn't just say bibbidi-bobbidi-boo. It's not how it works. He sends Jesus and lives perfectly even in suffering and endures the painful death on the cross.

See, he tells Joshua the priest verse 8 this whole thing with the dirty clothes gone and the new clean turban is what? A sign. It's a sign that he's going to do for his people something just like this when he sends his servant the branch.

That may sound weird. Servant and branch. Both terms here for the promised Messiah. The rescuer God's sending to redeem. And when he comes God says I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

[24 : 42] Y'all that's a lot of sin. Have you read this? The Old Testament part? Lots of sin, lots of people, lots of generation, the whole land full of sin.

Repeated idolatry. Failure to keep promises to do better next time. Way more sin than you've had time to commit in your life or ever will.

And God says in one day he wipes it all away. And writes an inscription on it.

What is that new identity, new name tag that you receive? It's holy to the Lord. Set apart for him.

That's the inscription on the priest's garments. A stone on the beautiful garments that the priest would be wearing that reads holy to the Lord. God says I'm writing that on you, on my people.

[25 : 47] Hear me. You can trust in Jesus and know that Jesus paid it all. Everything. It's okay that you're not okay.

You haven't figured it out and fixed everything because Jesus can take away the mess and make you pure in an instant. That's the good news of the Bible.

That's the message of this book is that people like us who don't figure it out and don't get life together actually have a Savior who removes all of that and makes them glorious the way they've always wanted to be.

we trust Jesus for that. He'll do that for you. Will you trust Jesus that his perfect blood is more than enough payment for your biggest sin, for your darkest failure?

There's hope for all of us. Please don't despair. Don't give up hope hope when someone so powerful and so gracious offers you hope this morning.

[27 : 00] Will you keep trusting that his perfect obedience, not yours, his perfect obedience is enough that God loves and delights in you who have trusted Jesus.

Don't believe Satan's lies to the contrary. Listen, friend who's never met Jesus before, it really is this good. We actually, we Christians actually struggle to believe it too.

We struggle to believe God loves us like that in spite of ourselves. We're still learning to trust him for that and Satan still lies to us and tells us it's not true but it is and it's glorious.

And then God finishes off this picture of the gospel. As we walk with God in our new clothes as his priests trusting him following his word we always have access into his presence verse seven.

Access not merely into a nice event but into the head table into the presence of the God of the universe. What an incredible blessing.

[28 : 12] blessing. It's one thing that God would pluck you off the side of the highway and take off your orange jumpsuit and throw a tux on you and bring you to the formal event but he walks you right up to the head table and sits you down with him.

An immeasurably gracious blessing. Of course we don't deserve that. And it's a blessing not just for us but for others.

Go back to where we started. Israel was called by God to be yes a nation that had priests priests who represented them to God and God to them.

They were also called to be a nation of priests all of them being a nation of priests who all together represented God to the world.

A light to the nation. Right? That was why they were there. And God says yes yes a light to the nations you will do this again.

[29 : 19] Verse 10 in that day declares the Lord of hosts every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.

Do you hear what he's saying? He's talking about blessing. We will be blessed again. That's what the image means peace and prosperity under your vine and fig tree.

Yes but blessed for the sake of others. We will not only be invited to the head table at the black tie wedding feast of the lamb but also asked to set the guest list.

What? God to invite others to come with you you get to bring them. You get to invite people to join you in God's presence forever.

In other words we are given the privilege of expressing the grace that we ourselves have experienced. Of finding others undeserving like us and saying here's a place for undeserving people.

[30 : 24] There's a table that you get to sit at and a God who loves you and makes you clean. We get the privilege of introducing others to the one who redeems us when we don't deserve it.

And that part of our mission as priests as God's people is what we're going to focus on next Sunday. It's so exciting. I hope you're here. But Southwood people of God called to be priests to Huntsville and to the nations you need to hear this truth.

You may be a church with a split in your history. You may be a church with a young pastor whose leadership at times seems a bit wobbly.

God says I decide whom I will choose whom I will love treasure and use in my kingdom and you're part of my people united to my son so I choose you to be my beloved children I choose you to storm the gates of hell and rescue dying sinners because the accusations of Satan and the gates of hell will never for more information visit us online at southwood.org