

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Zechariah 3:1-5 on August 23, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Leading Questions

Today's Focus: Is Not This Man a Burning Stick Snatched From the Fire?

“God Has An Answer For Your Insecurity”

In the name of Jesus Christ who speaks to the Father in our Defense—the only Righteous One. Amen.

Friends, how many of you have kids heading back to school soon? Or can you remember when you were a kid...What did you do for the first day of school after summer vacation? Did you have to take a bath the night before? Did you get a haircut? Did you pick out a special outfit to wear or did you perhaps get to go to the store to get something new? I mean there was something special about that first day of school, wasn't there?

But have you ever seen this as a parent, or can you remember...did you ever stand there staring into your closet on the brink of tears because you didn't know what to wear? Or you realized that what you wanted to wear was dirty or wrinkled or didn't quite fit anymore? That's frustrating, isn't it? It can be an uncomfortable feeling to not know what to wear or even worse to not feel like you have anything appropriate to wear.

Well in a way, picking out our clothes when heading back to school or heading out the door to go to work reveals something about our insecurities, doesn't it? “What will people think? What impression will this outfit make? Will I stand out? Will I fit in? Does it even fit?” And those are just sort of the superficial worries.

Then there are the deeper things that can make us feel really insecure—feelings like inadequacy, guilt, shame, bitterness, or regret. Forget the clothes in our closets, there are insecurities that lurk deep in the closets of our hearts. “Am I good enough? Will my performance be enough? Do I even belong here? Can I be forgiven after what I've done? Will I ever find anyone who will truly love me? Someone who will accept me? Does God even care about me?” Friends, what makes you feel insecure?

Well today we're going to apply something from the Bible that I believe has the potential to permanently change your self-image. I'm praying that God opens the eyes of your heart to see things from perhaps a brand new perspective today—his perspective. And so to do this there's a little scene we're going to look at together this morning. The scene we're going to study—you might think of it as if a little video clip—comes from a vision that God once gave a prophet named Zechariah. It's a short but powerful scene. **God has an answer for our insecurity.**

Let's go find it. *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. 2 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?”*

3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4 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.”

5 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.

So like any movie or story there’s a cast of characters. The scene moves quickly so did you catch who they all were? First we’re introduced to Joshua. Who is he? He’s the high priest. He’s the man who represents all the people of Israel before God. It was his job to intercede with God on behalf of the people. It was his job to enter into the Most Holy Place in the temple on the great Day of Atonement. In modern terms you could think of him sort of like the lead pastor of a church. By extension you could also think of him today like our friend Caleb Schultz who’s being installed to serve as our student assistant from the Seminary this year. And as a way for you to relate to this scene you could even put yourself in Joshua’s shoes because the office of a priest was one that was representative of all the people. So what was true of Joshua as a person by nature way back in the Old Testament is true also all of us in the New Testament church. So, we’ve got Joshua the high priest.

Who’s standing in front of him? *The angel of the LORD*. Notice it doesn’t say “*an* angel of the LORD.” Here it says “*the* angel of the LORD.” Sounds a little mysterious, doesn’t it? Well who is “*the* angel of the LORD”? Notice too how right after he is introduced it says in verse two, “*The LORD said to Satan...*” It’s subtle but did you catch it? Here “*the* angel of the LORD” actually speaks with the full of authority of the LORD himself.

So who is “*the* angel of the LORD?” I believe it’s the 2nd person of the Trinity. This is Jesus—who many scholars have called the “pre-incarnate Christ”. In other words we know from the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God who has existed from all eternity. And as we confess in the creed, 2,000 years ago, this very Son of God was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became fully human. But before his incarnation—when he was conceived as a human baby—he always existed from eternity. And it wasn’t like Jesus was sort of just sitting on the sidelines doing nothing, just hanging out in heaven waiting for his time to come. On the contrary, here we see him make a cameo appearance as “*the* angel of the LORD.” *Angel* by the way is a word that simply means “messenger.” So here Jesus is the messenger who both comes from God and who also is the LORD God who rebukes Satan.

So we’ve got Joshua the high priest. We’ve got the angel of the LORD. And at Joshua’s right hand side we see Satan. But more important apparently than any description of what Satan might look like, is what he sounds like. In other words what is Satan here trying to do at Joshua’s side? Basically the same thing he tries to do at yours and mine, right?

Accuse. That’s actually what the name “Satan” means, did you know that—*the accuser*? The prosecuting attorney. His name is his job description. Sometimes it might sound loud like shouting. Sometimes it might sound soft like a whisper. But he accuses day and night insinuating things like this:

“You worthless piece of garbage. You’ll never amount to anything. And who are you kidding? You’re a joke. No, worse. You’re a fraud. I’m on to you. And don’t think you’re going to get away with anything. I’m going to expose you—who you really are. Your friends will abandon you. Your family will despise you. Your church friends are just a bunch of hypocrites like you anyway. You’ll never be forgiven for what you’ve done. You don’t belong in church. What were you even thinking in coming here? Just stay home because you’re not good enough. You won’t ever be good enough for God. And you really think he loves you? He doesn’t even like you. Why else would all this bad stuff be happening to you? God doesn’t care. He’s not even there for you.”

Sound familiar, friends? I’m sure it did for Joshua. “Who do you think you are to talk for God? You’re the High Priest? Really? Don’t you think there are others who are more deserving of that position than you? You really think you’re clean enough to meet God’s basic requirements much less be his holy representative? You really think God’s going to spare you just because you’re the so-called high priest?”

And here’s what makes Satan’s accusations sting so much. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes... he’s right. Like in the case of Joshua, what do we see? In this vision recorded by Zechariah, Joshua’s standing there wearing filthy, dirty clothes. In other words we see that he’s not fit to serve. He’s obviously unclean. He’s covered in his sins. He’s filthy. It’s as if Satan can say, “See, look at you, Joshua. Here you are in the presence of the LORD and your worst nightmare is about to come true. It’s just like I’ve been saying, Joshua, he’s going to condemn you. The angel of the LORD is gonna strike you down where you stand.”

And so how do you think Joshua feels? I’m going to take a wild guess here and say totally insecure, totally condemned. Because he’s speechless. There’s nothing he can say. He knows that God is holy, but he is not. He knows that God’s standard is perfection, but he has serious flaws. He knows that God in his holiness is like a consuming fire, but he is like a piece of straw. And he knows there’s nothing he can do about it. Friends, I wonder...do you?

There’s nothing you or I can say that will undo the reckless, mean, and spiteful words we’ve spoken. There’s nothing we can do to make amends either for the willful or the ignorant wrongs we’ve done. There’s no amount of trying harder, cleaning up our act, or moral improvement program that can provide an answer for the insecurity we rightly sometimes feel. In fact, in a way, the highest offense against the Most High God is to think there is!

Another one of God’s prophets, Isaiah, once said that our attempts even to please God are hideously ugly in God’s sight if we think somehow by doing them we can be good enough or get clean enough to come closer into God’s presence or somehow gain more of his approval. So it’s said in Scripture: *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). If we’re honest, and I pray that you are today, we have to see ourselves right there with Joshua. In the presence of God, we stand condemned wearing the filthy clothes of our sins. And Satan who accuses us is right. We have nothing to stay. We’re guilty. We have no answer to give for our insecurity.

But then the angel of the LORD asks a question. *2 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?"* And the answer to this question, friends, is... YES! Yes he is. The LORD God himself is saying, "I have chosen this man, Joshua. You see a burning stick? So do I. You see someone about to be consumed by the fire? So do I. You see someone who can't do a single thing to escape the flames? So do I. So I have reached down and yanked him out. I have reached into the fire and snatched him away to safety."

And friends, what God has done for Joshua, he has also done for you and me! God so loved the world that God's own Son, Jesus Christ, came down from heaven and was born a human baby just like you and me. He grew up under God's commands just like us and was like us in every single way except one. Unlike you and me Jesus did not sin. He helped sinners, yet he managed not to fall into temptation. He touched lepers, but didn't get their disease. He got close to sinners, but didn't incur their guilt. He walked alongside people who were sexually impure, but he himself stayed pure. He ate with people who were considered the dirtiest sinners around, but he himself stayed perfectly clean.

And so unlike Joshua, Jesus was the High Priest who could perfectly represent us as our substitute. Unlike Joshua, Jesus was the high priest who could offer the perfect sacrifice. Unlike Joshua, Jesus lived up to the name which succinctly describes his office, "Yeshua"—meaning God saves. So Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice for sin not because he deserved that kind of punishment but especially because you and I did. In order to pull us out of the fire we deserved, he stepped in. On the cross Jesus was stripped of his clothes so that the filthy rags of our sins could be imputed to him. He got what we deserved. And the proof that you and I are forgiven is the fact that Jesus paved a trail out of the tomb in which he was buried. Death could not hold him down because our sin debt that we owed God he paid up in full. Therefore what the LORD said to Satan, he can rightly now say of all of you, "Is not this man or woman a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Yes! Yes you are.

There's God's answer to your insecurity. But it gets even better! *3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4 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." 5 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.*

Why was the angel of the LORD standing by? Because he was giving his approval—his approval that filthy Joshua was now completely clean and clothed! Sinful Joshua was fully forgiven. Unfaithful Joshua was actually fit to serve.

Friends, I don't know what's making you feel insecure right now in life. I don't know how Satan has been accusing you. But let me tell you something, whatever it is, it does not define you. Satan's worst accusations cannot hurt you even if he keeps whispering to you that you're worthless, you're dirty, or he tells you that you've been a whore. His accusations cannot harm you because here's how God sees you now...someone who is "Holy to the LORD."

When we first saw Joshua, what was he wearing...you remember? He was wearing filthy clothes. And some of you may feel dirty because of your sins too. But at the end of the scene, Joshua isn't wearing dirty clothes anymore, is he? Now he's richly robed. He's wearing the festive garments of the high priest. His clothes are clean. They are pristine. And on his head is a linen turban. Do you know what was on the high priest's turban? There was a gold plate engraved with the inscription: "HOLY TO THE LORD" (cf. Ex. 28:36). You see Joshua's old clothes weren't just taken away. He was given new clothes to wear, clean clothes which represented that he was totally clean in God's sight.

And friends, because of Jesus Christ you are too! By being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... God washed away your filth. By being baptized, he also clothed you with the robe of Christ's holiness. That's why today we can so rightly sing in that beautiful hymn: "Jesus, your blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in that great day--Who can a word against me say? Fully through you absolved I am From sin and fear, from guilt and shame."

Satan is an accuser, but Jesus is our advocate. Satan is a prosecutor, but Jesus is our defense attorney. Satan condemns, but Jesus defends. So whatever outfit you pick out to wear tomorrow to school or to work or wherever you go, more important is to remember your baptism and how you've been outfitted with Christ's holiness by faith. **Jesus is God's Answer to Our Insecurity.**

My Next Steps

Points to Ponder: Satan is an accuser, but Jesus is our advocate. Satan is a prosecutor, but Jesus is our defense attorney. Satan condemns, but Jesus defends.

Treasure to Share: *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:33-34).*

Action to Take: What are you going to wear to school/work this week? More important than the outfit you pick out is to consider how you've been outfitted with Christ's holiness by faith. When you feel insecure, remember the fact of your baptism. You've been washed clean of sin and fully clothed with Christ's obedience. You are truly "Holy to the LORD!" because your great high priest Jesus paid for sins once for all. (cf. Hebrews 9:26)

Not yet baptized? Shoot Pastor Ben a text message this week to ask about how you too can receive this gift of baptism as a permanent answer to insecurity!