

The Promise of Atonement

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Preacher: Nathan Davis

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's great to be here together with you this morning. Let me add my welcome.! If I haven't met you, my name is Nathan. But let's keep hearing from God's Word, shall we?

Zechariah chapter 3. Back a little bit from Matthew 22. I don't have the exact page number if you've got one of the church Bibles, sorry. But it should only be back 20 pages or so from Matthew 22.

Okay, let's read from Zechariah 3. 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.

[1 : 10] 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 assigned. 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 neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree. Let's pray.

[2 : 24] Dear loving Father, we do thank you for your precious gift, your word. Help us to listen carefully to it. Help us to respond rightly, Lord, and help us to rejoice knowing that our iniquity before you is removed.

Amen. Well, friends, it is good to be here with you this morning. As Roy mentioned earlier, the pastors and us MTSs were down on the central coast at the Reach Australia conference.

There were teams from churches all over Australia there as well. And we spent a good couple of days thinking about God's mission. The work that he is doing in drawing people into his kingdom and how we, as his church and his people, how we can partner with him in that work.

It was quite a helpful couple of days and one for which we could continue to pray would help sharpen us as a church as we go about on mission. That as our leaders model, teach and encourage us about the priority of the gospel, that we would be courageous in sharing it.

But also that things like the Good News course, our services here on Sunday, our kids' church and our youth group, that they would all be strengthened and refined so that more and more people who haven't yet heard the precious words of the gospel would.

[3 : 51] Plus one. But anyway, one of the things that we spent time talking about was how central Jesus' atonement on the cross is to all of this.

And if you need a simple definition, you can just break that word up into its constituent parts and it basically explains itself. Atonement at one-ment.

Two things previously separated and irreconcilable now brought together. It was the day of atonement in the Old Testament that enabled Israel to live in the presence of God.

Sinful people, holy God. Separate, irreconcilable, but through atonement, now able to live together. And as in the old, so in the new.

It is Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross through which we have atonement. Sinful people deserving of death and judgment, holy and righteous God, unable to allow sin to go unpunished.

[4 : 56] Now at one, through the death of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus. Now there's a whole bunch more depth to it and likely for many of you this is nothing new because at our core we are atonement people, aren't we?

This is the message we preach. The gospel that we proclaim, isn't it? That by trusting in Jesus and living with Him as your King, you can be made at one with God.

Made right before Him. This is who we are. But I wonder if you feel less like that at times and more like Joshua here at the start of Zechariah chapter 3.

Less like how you imagine someone who is right with God feels and more like someone in filthy clothes before a pure judge. Woefully underdressed and guilty as sin.

And perhaps you've come here this morning because you've never felt right. You've never felt clean. You see and feel the filth on your clothing.

[6 : 09] But in either case, whether or not that is something for which this is the first time you've come to realise that or perhaps you are here today because you feel as if, yeah, perhaps in the weeks or the months past, perhaps previously you've felt clean but now feel dirty.

It feels like a stain. It feels like no matter how hard you scrub, no matter how hard you wash, I mean only a few weeks ago we were looking at Mark chapter 9, if only we could cut off our limbs, if only we could cut out our heart, could we be made clean.

But no matter what you do and how you try to get rid of it, you feel filthy, feel dirty. I know I do. Well, if that is you, then what a glorious passage this is.

What wonderful medicine this is for the ailing soul. And like a cool mountain creek flowing clear and clean, let's drink deeply from these wonderful words of life.

So hopefully you've got an outline there in front of you and you should see that roughly Zechariah falls into two sections around two declarations that God makes. They're in verse 4 and in verse 9 as he proclaims that he has taken away the iniquity of Joshua, the high priest, which then kind of stands as the firstfruits for what will happen more broadly when he will also take away the iniquity of the land.

[7 : 46] And so as we start, we're immediately taken with Zechariah in the next of these series of visions to this heavenly courtroom. You might remember that diagram showing an overview of the visions.

I think we've got one in the slides. That one. Perfect. This is now vision 4, the first of that central set of visions, which is quite important, right?

Because as we get to the centre of this section, we're getting right to the heart of what God is planning to do. We've seen a number of times God saying that he has again chosen Jerusalem, that he will dwell there.

But here in chapter 3, we get the culmination of that. And we see what is necessary and what God is willing to do in order to live amongst his people.

But back to the courtroom. And the one on trial, well, that is the high priest Joshua. 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.

[8 : 54] It's quite an evocative scene, and it's quite easy to picture, isn't it? Here's this man, Joshua, sitting in the box. He's on trial, and he's dwarfed by these two colossal figures he stands between.

In front of him stands the judge, the angel of the Lord, who, just quickly, you'll notice is interchangeable with the Lord himself. You see that in verse 2.

But as far as courts go, this is it, isn't it? This is the highest court in the land. God himself is judging. And next to Joshua, well, his prosecutor, Satan, the accuser.

You might see in your footnotes there that the name Satan literally means accuser or adversary, which is exactly what he's doing here. But I think a lot of the time, I know at least for myself, when I read a passage like this and it says Satan, I immediately bring along all my baggage tied up in that word, in what I know about Satan, and perhaps I, and perhaps you as well, we tend to import other ideas, other passages, things we've heard, and tend to actually miss what the passage itself is

saying.

Because there is a bunch of information about Satan or the devil in the New Testament. But the important thing is, at this point in the Old Testament and in Zechariah, there's actually very little detail given about him.

[10:20] So we've got to be, we just do have to be careful with that, make sure we aren't bringing in stuff that the passage doesn't mention that kind of thing. But what we do see is this enemy and the accusation he brings.

An accusation against Joshua, the high priest, and by association, against all who are part of this tiny repopulated Jerusalem. It's not the powerful hulking nations around them that is their greatest threat, but actually their spiritual enemy.

Satan and the accusation that he brings against God's people. And it's an accusation seen clearly in the filth of Joshua's clothing.

And actually so self-evident is Joshua's guilt in his clothing that the prosecution needs no argument.

Verse 3, now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments.

Exhibit A, your honour, the man himself. I mean, just look at him, he's filthy. What more is there to say? Talk about an open and shut case.

[11:34] Here stands Joshua before the divine judge of the universe as guilty as the clothes on his back. But, it's not just Joshua, is it?

Because Joshua is not just any man, but the high priest of Israel. Israel. As the high priest, he represents Israel before God. And not only that, but he is also the means by which Israel can dwell with God.

Which, of course, it's done through the sacrificial system, which the high priest is essential for. So the high priest both represents Israel and makes sacrifice for Israel.

If the high priest is unclean, Israel is unclean. And if God has promised that he will once again dwell in Jerusalem, and this little resettlement is working to rebuild God's house there, well, it doesn't matter how good your temple is if your high priest is filthy.

And Joshua is filthy, dressed in uncleanness. The high priest was the epitome of cleanliness in Israel, the high point of holy, upright, and clean living.

[12:50] There were restrictions on who they could marry. They weren't allowed to have injuries or blemishes. They couldn't go near dead bodies. And their clothes had to be flawless. They had to be clean.

As you go up the ladder from your run-of-the-mill Israelites to priest, then to high priest, the specifications of cleanliness only get more and more stringent. I think we've got a slide for this, just to display that. And I think I've just noticed as well that it's not quite right. Ideally, actually, those circles should be in the middle of each other.

There you go. You get design choices getting in the way of clear theology. So apologies for that. Ideally, because the Holy of Holies is actually right in the middle of Israel and the high priest and God himself is in the middle of the Holy of Holies.

Anyway, I'm sure you can make that mental leap for me. But Israel was to be, like you can see, right, Israel is meant to be distinct from the nations, the priests even more so, and the high priests even more so again.

[13:57] That's because the priests and the high priests were entering deeper and deeper into the temple, closer and closer to the presence of God. Therefore, their requirements for cleanliness were higher and higher.

And this was seen in how they dressed. We won't go there now, but Exodus 28 spends a whole chapter describing in exact detail the clothing that the priests and the high priests were to wear, from the breastplate to the ephod and the robe and to the coat.

God very particularly specifies the clothing that the priests are to wear. And the seriousness of their dress is made explicit throughout the chapter.

Actually, what is repeated a few times in that chapter is the phrase that they need to wear all of this lest they die. This is no casual beach wear.

I'll just put up one verse on the screen from verse 2 of chapter 28 which just says that the high priest was to have holy garments for glory and for beauty.

[15:08] They were to set him apart in his service of God as a priest and were essential for the priest to serve God. These clothes were necessary to perform the sacrifices that removed the sin of

the Israelites and made them clean.

And particularly necessary for the high priest on the day of atonement when he would enter into the holy of holies into the presence of God and offer a sacrifice to cleanse the sin from all of Israel. like a uniform but perhaps the fanciest one you've ever seen because that's kind of the point of it isn't it because they are for glory and for beauty the more glorious the outfit the more glorious the person that you're serving.

But here stands Joshua the high priest the epitome of Israel's cleanliness dressed in filthy garments his priestly clothes dirty and soiled ritually unclean yes outwardly unclean unworthy to offer sacrifices to cleanse Israel unclean and unable to be made clean filthy with the only thing to wipe off his muck more filth but even more so inwardly unclean corrupt unrighteous and sinful worthy only of the judgment of God not good enough and never able to be good enough which is not just a problem for Joshua and Israel but it's also a problem for us isn't it like Joshua and like Israel we are all by nature filthy our most righteous deeds nothing more than filthy rags the best that we can do what we can offer

God is not pure and clean but dirty and ugly however immediately as Joshua stands there before his accuser has a chance to say anything God declares his judgment verse 2 now 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 and down at verse 4 and the angel said to those who were standing before him remove the filthy garments from him and to him he said behold I've 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 I mean what glorious words to hear what a splendid and beautiful and merciful pronouncement this is grace isn't it not because of anything we have done in fact in spite of it

[18:18] God's undeserved mercy like a stick pulled out of a fire burnt and smoking Joshua is pulled out of his uncleanness and why well because God has chosen Jerusalem because when God decides to act you can be sure he'll see it come about because our mighty and loving God desires it God has chosen to once again dwell in Jerusalem he has chosen to build his house there he has chosen to live amongst his people and he has chosen to purify his high priest so that he can Joshua is cleansed he's given new pure priestly garments his iniquity his guilt has been removed now dressed in clean clothes he's reinstated as high priest he's now worthy to come into the presence of God and serve him as his filthy garments have been removed so too has his iniquity what before was unclean is now clean what was unworthy is now worthy and now with a clean high priest there is hope for the rest of

Israel now the temple that is being built can be used and now Israel can be made clean through the temple sacrifices and now God can once again dwell with his chosen people with a single declaration God has made it possible to once again live amongst his people and having shown us this very physical display in changing Joshua's filthy clothing to clean clothing God now explains and declares what this means in verses 6 and 7 read from verse 6 with me 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 I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here rather than being condemned and removed Joshua is able to have access into the place where God dwells however note the conditional having been made clean

Joshua needs to remain clean he can't go outside again to play in the mud having been reinstated as high priest! Joshua needs to continue to act in a high priestly manner he needs to live and act in such a way that befits this position that he's been cleaned up for but if he does God promises to justify and vindicate him if he lives faithfully God will be faithful towards him Joshua will rule over God's house and his courts and that's the temple by the way but he will also be justified before God he will have right of access before him compare that to the start of the vision Joshua has come before God but only as a guilty man deserving of judgment and punishment he's a criminal with no rights to go anywhere but having been made clean if he faithfully continues in God's way he leaves having the right of access to the presence of God justified and clean his guilt removed no longer a criminal but innocent and as glorious as that is

God doesn't stop there rather he pushes it out further and further not satisfied with just making grand promises to Joshua God turns his attention to the entire land and he does so via a series of three vivid pictures the branch the stone and the vine and the fig tree from verse 8 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 the 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 his fig tree now if you only think like me you're reading that and thinking what on earth is God on about the ruling principle for this section so it's important to keep the big picture in mind but yes the end of verse nine what a glorious and yet outrageous promise that it is that in a single day

God will remove all the iniquity in the land once and for all okay so that's the big picture let's make sure we keep that in mind but starting with the branch!

[23 : 25] what is happening here and how are Joshua and his friends assigned well I think the first thing to notice is that the friends sitting before Joshua in verse 8 are different to those standing with God in verse 7 back in verse 7 it's this heavenly place which is on view but I think in verse 8 it's back with an earthly perspective and these friends are part of the people that have returned exile to Jerusalem they're part of the returnees which importantly is a clear demonstration that God has again chosen Jerusalem isn't it because he's already brought his people back there he has brought his people back to Jerusalem because he intends to dwell amongst them which as we know is also why Joshua is cleansed and reinstated as high priest God has reinstated his people and he has also reinstated his and now having done that

God is promising that he isn't going to stop there that in fact they are only actually just a sign of what is to come and that now that the Israelites are back the high priest is back there's just one more piece to the puzzle and that piece that bit that is still to come is the branch okay well cool that makes sense but who or what on earth is the branch well at this point it's important to think about the wider context of the Old Testament to understand this verse because the branch is an important title that Isaiah and Jeremiah develop and significantly it's the title for a new Davidic king you might remember that in Isaiah the kingly line the Davidic line is likened to a thick tree that is cut down in judgment and only a stump remains however as you continue reading through Isaiah there is the promise that from that stump will shoot a branch that will bear fruit a new king in the line of David will come and rule over God's people and that's the branch right okay still with me does that make sense good okay so we're there so what has this got to do with the high priest and here I think Jeremiah chapter 33 is quite helpful so quickly turn there and it'll also be up on the screen I think as well jumping a bit around there's a lot of kind of Old Testament context and stuff to be jumping around through but hopefully this will help clear up the branch so chapter 33 from verse 14 behold the days are coming declares the Lord when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land there's our branch right but keep reading in those days

Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely the that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant and the Levitical priests who minister to me now did you see that that what God is promising Jeremiah here is that this!

And did you notice that not only that but also that comment that Judah will be saved Jerusalem will dwell securely that's exactly what we're talking about here in Zechariah isn't it these are big promises and here in Zechariah 3 the high priest has been restored restoration has begun but God isn't going to leave it half done he's going to finish what he started he's cleaned up his priests so now we're expecting a king the people have returned to the land there is a clean high priest now all we need is a king and the certainty that the king will come is being signaled by the people and the high priest who have already been reinstated in Jerusalem and actually over the next couple of weeks we'll see at least the initial fulfillment of that promise okay so that's the branch but what follows in verses 9 and 10 the stone the removal of iniquity the sitting under the vine and the fig tree they're all tied to the coming of this king with the coming of this branch this king all of these promises in verse 9 and 10 will come about and so what's the first thing that is associated with this branch well oddly enough a stone with seven eyes pretty weird right and

[29 : 18] I've been back and forth a little bit on what this means but I think the stone in view is a building stone you might have a footnote that says that the seven eyes could be seven facets which

would imply a gem or something like that but I don't think so because when the Old Testament refers to a gem in that way it usually adds in the description of a precious stone here we've just got stone so I think what is in view is a building stone a block a temple stone importantly exactly what stone it is like a cap stone or a corner stone we're not told but I don't think that's important what's important is that it's a building stone and more importantly it's God's stone we know there is an inscription on it but we aren't told what that inscription is because what's important is that it is God who inscribes it it's his stone and that's to say that here God is promising to rebuild his temple God will rebuild it and he will watch over it the number seven symbolizing a complete or wholeness to the sense that

God is watching over it and out from it his presence is right there this is the temple that he will dwell in the center from which he will rule over his people which is why he will remove the sin of the land so that he can dwell in his temple his house with a clean and righteous people and it will happen in one day in a single instant no longer will sacrifices have to be constantly offered up no longer will the high priest have to offer an atonement for all Israel each and every year because they will no longer be sinful on one day God will remove the sin of the!

God is going to remove the sin of his people he is going to dwell with them caring and watching over them no longer oppression and war but peace no longer destruction which cuts down gardens that are burnt or chopped down during oppression and war but instead peace which builds up and allows growth and prosperity this is a promise of lasting peace throughout the whole land long enough for vines and fig trees to grow and provide shade for sitting under this is a snapshot of what life dwelling with God looks like now it's about time to tie things together and to finish up and there are some important threads here to follow through but this chapter really gets to the core of who we are as Christians doesn't it this is atonement two irreconcilable parties now brought together a filthy high priest and people and a righteous and just judge now at peace now dwelling as one this is the hope that we hold out to our broken and lost world isn't it and if you are someone who feels like Joshua stained by sin dressed in filth guilty before the judge and ruler of this world then aren't these beautiful words for us because we are filthy or we all have been filthy by our nature we are sinful but just like Joshua God doesn't leave us in our filth like him we too can have fresh and clean clothes and be dressed not in sinful clothing but in robes of righteousness a righteousness won by the coming of the true branch through the coming of the promised Davidic king Jesus and through the better high priest not Joshua who still had to offer sacrifice on sacrifice but through our better high priest who in just one single day was able to offer one single sacrifice in one single day was able to remove the iniquity of the whole land perhaps the eagle eye amongst you have been wondering about the justice of this chapter how

God can simply just remove iniquity or remove sin without punishment well in short stick around for chapter 12 but what chapter 3 is a promise how God goes about fulfilling that promise we don't see until the second half of Zechariah but what a clear and awesome promise it is an offer of forgiveness for anyone who wants to get out of filthy clothing and into clean clothes the once for all sacrifice has already been made in Jesus he stands with open hands and an open offer of forgiveness through Jesus we have access not to an old stone temple but into the very presence of God himself able to dwell with him that is our current spiritual reality but also our future hope listen to Revelation chapter 7 from verse 9 after this

[34 : 52] I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits!

on the throne and! Then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these clothed in white robes and from where have they come?

I said to him sir you know and he said to me these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes no longer filthy our clothes has been made clean in the blood of Jesus through him we are spiritually dwelling with God while also looking forward to when we will physically dwell with him no longer wearing clothes of filth stained by our

sin and guilt but wearing robes of pure white a spotless robe that can never be soiled that is the glorious future awaiting those who put on

Jesus righteous robes but it's also our present reality even though we are still beset with sin and struggle against it before God we are robed in white we have already been washed we are clean so don't go back to wallowing in the mud don't go on sinning but also don't listen to the accusation of Satan when he stands beside us and accuses us of guilt because that is not the reality that is no longer the clothing that you wear if you have accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness then you have been washed fully cleansed by his one sacrifice for all so let's be constantly encouraging one another of this seeking to live as the holy people that God has made us to be and eagerly waiting for that final day when we will be brought together before his throne where we will live with him dwelling in his presence and with our great high priest our brother and our king!

Jesus Christ let's pray dear holy and righteous Lord thank you that through our king Jesus our iniquity has been removed help us to live the holy lives that you have called us to give us confidence that we are made pure and holy by him and help us to eagerly wait for that final day when we will stand before you and Lord when we dwell in your presence amen