

August 2, 2026

A HEAVENLY PICTURE AND PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

Zechariah 3:1-10

(4 of 10 in a series through Zechariah)

To this point in Zechariah, we've seen three of the glorious visions that the Lord gave to the prophet in one night to encourage his people, and they've provided glorious truths. In the first two visions, the Lord showed Zechariah with the imagery of horsemen patrolling the earth and reporting to the Lord, that he knew everything going on, wasn't ignorant of their struggles, would see that the temple was rebuilt, and would one day set everything right. Then, in the third vision, the Lord made clear that his blessings were beyond anything they could imagine. He'd bring so many into his new Jerusalem that walls could not contain them. And, most gloriously, God himself would dwell in their midst, as his people would be his inheritance. It's hard to imagine God's promises to Zechariah in these visions getting any better. And yet there was a problem, an obstacle that would seem to be overcome if indeed God was going to dwell with his people and they with him. What about their sin?

You see, from the beginning, as old as the fall itself, the question the Bible has raised is, "How can a sinful people dwell in the presence of a holy God?" Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence of God in the garden, but once they sinned, they were driven out of the garden, away from the Lord's presence. Similarly, after Israel sinned in the incident with the golden calf, the Lord announced that he would not allow his presence to be with his people. Moses would have to go outside the camp of the people to meet with the Lord. But eventually, the Lord *did* allow the temple to be built under Solomon's reign, and he blessed it and his people by allowing his presence to dwell there. But how? I mean, it's not like they weren't still sinful.

Well, the answer is the sacrificial system. The Lord set up an entire system to deal with atoning for the people's sins. There were animal sacrifices, the shedding of blood, and the like. But at the center of this was the high priest. Hebrews 5:1—which we heard read earlier—gives us a definition of the high priest and his role, saying, "Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

In other words, God chose one man—the high priest—to be the representative for the people. One day a year, on the day of atonement, he would go into the place where God manifested his presence in the temple (the most holy place), as a representative for the people, and he would offer a sacrifice for sin. This was the only way the Lord would allow his presence to dwell in the midst of the people. In other words, the presence of God in the temple, amidst the people of Israel, required the sacrificial system, and the only way the sacrificial system can function is if you have a high priest who could represent the people before God in offering sacrifices for their sins.

This is crucial for our understanding the Lord providing this fourth vision Zechariah receives in the night. Certainly, the visions tell of a future more glorious than anything that would be

experienced in the building of the temple in the sixth century BC or the city of Jerusalem in which it was located. We noted that the last time we were in Zechariah, looking at the nature of the coming new Jerusalem. However, all the blessings that the Lord was bringing to the people in Zechariah's day were a necessary type and picture of these coming things. In other words, the Lord commanded the people to build the temple and eventually rebuild the city so that he might allow his presence to dwell in their midst as a picture of what one day would be in a much more glorious day. And, we know from the books of Ezra and Haggai that the people did indeed begin rebuilding the temple in Zechariah's day.

But here's the problem. If the temple is to be rebuilt so that God's presence might dwell in the midst of his people again, then the sacrificial system needs to be reinstituted, and this requires a high priest, something that hasn't been mentioned to this point in Zechariah. And then we get to this fourth vision, and at its center is a high priest named Joshua.

We know Joshua from the book of Ezra (though he's called "Jeshua" —just another English transliteration of his Hebrew name—there). In Ezra 5:2 we read, "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God [Haggai and Zechariah] were with them, supporting them." So, Joshua was the high priest at the time that Zechariah receives these visions. But in this fourth vision, Joshua's qualifications to serve as a high priest are challenged, by none other than Satan himself.

In the vision, Zechariah sees a vision of a courtroom hearing in heaven, with Joshua at the center. The situation is dire. Joshua is standing before the angel the Lord who is none other than the Lord himself. And to his right is Satan, ready to accuse him before God. And to make matters worse, we're told in verse 3 that Joshua was "clothed in filthy garments," and the word "filthy" is used in Scripture to describe basically every nasty thing that can come out of the human body. In other words, Joshua is clothed in disgusting garments that would make anyone recoil. There's no way, as is, he could serve as a high priest before God, especially since this filth represents sin. And so Satan is ready to pounce with his accusation. It seems that all of God's promises are teetering in the balance. And yet, this is when this vision reveals some glorious truths that I want us to see this morning because what the Lord says of and does for Joshua in this unfolding courtroom drama is what he has said of and done for us as well as believers. Therefore, I want to take the truths that God reveals concerning Joshua and state them about us as we go along. The first of these is that God has chosen his people for himself and called us to himself.

God has chosen his people for himself and called us to himself

It's interesting, the way the vision unfolds, with the description of Satan at Joshua's right hand, ready to accuse Joshua before God, you'd think the first thing spoken is Satan's reasonable charge that Joshua is unworthy. After all, who could look at Joshua in his filth, representing sin, and not conclude that he's unworthy to serve as a high priest? So, you're anticipating Satan's accusation. But actually, Satan doesn't get to speak. Before he can voice any accusation, we read in verse 2, "And the LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!'" But why does the Lord rebuke

Satan? Well, as the Lord continues to speak, he first describes himself and then describes Joshua. He describes himself, saying, “The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!” and describes Joshua, saying, “Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” (v. 2).

The first thing that silences Satan from lobbing his accusations against Joshua is the Lord’s declaration that he has chosen Jerusalem. And since Joshua is a representative as a high priest of those in Jerusalem, the Lord is saying that he is the God who has chosen Joshua for himself. In other words, the Lord’s first declaration to Satan is, “Don’t you dare try to accuse him because I have chosen him.”

Now, this idea that God has chosen Joshua is not exceptional to Joshua. For example, we are told in Ephesians 1:4-5 that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” and “in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.” Now, many times when this idea of God choosing his people (known as the doctrine of election) comes up, we instantly begin devoting ourselves to mental exercises in asking how we put this together with issues of freedom and responsibility. But I want to encourage you to put that on hold for just a second—though there are answers to those questions—and take this in, allowing it to minister to you.

When God says that he chose Joshua or chose us before the foundation of the world, it’s a term of affection. In other words, God is saying that he set his affection on us before the world was ever founded. He made us the objects of his devotion before he ever created this world. Before we were born, we had already been marked out as the objects of God’s love. He said, “I am for that one. That one is mine.” That’s what God is saying of Joshua to Satan.

But why should that shut Satan up from hurling accusations? Well, Paul says in Romans 8:31 and 33, “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” In other words, does Satan actually think that he could sit and accuse one whom God has set his affection on and declared, “This one will be mine”?

And it’s not just that God chose Joshua (and us), but he called him to himself. The imagery used in our text is that Joshua was a brand plucked from the fire. In other words, like plucking a branch from being destroyed in a fire, God called Joshua out of exile in Babylon to be his high priest in Jerusalem, even as he has called each of us out of this world to himself. Therefore, if you’re repentant of your sins this morning and trusting in the crucified and risen Christ for your salvation, then you can say of yourself that God chose you, setting his affection on you in eternity past, and then called you to himself in this age, plucking you out of this world and bringing you to himself. And you should find great comfort in that.

The Lord didn’t have to reveal to us that he chose us for himself before the foundation of the world, setting his love and affection on us before we were born. He didn’t have to reveal to us that when we repented and believed, it was because he was calling us to himself, plucking us out of this world and destruction. So why did he? He revealed it to us because he wants us to have assurance when the accuser stands to hurl all kinds of accusations against us. He wants us to be able to say, “If God is for me, who can be against me?” He wants us to be able to say to our great

enemy, “Who are you to bring a charge against God’s elect.” He reveals these things because he wants us to be able to rest in the assurance that our God loves us and has made us his own and that nothing can change that. That’s the first thing the Lord reveals, that he has chosen us for himself and called us to himself. Second, he shows us that he has removed our sins and given us Christ’s righteousness.

God has removed our sins and given us Christ’s righteousness

As this scene continues, it’s not just that God proclaims that he has chosen this one clothed in filthy garments and has called him to himself, he does something about Joshua’s clothing. We read in verses 3-4, “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.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’” And, interestingly, Zechariah gets in on this, saying, “Let them put a clean turban on his head,” and we’re told, “So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by” (v. 5).

This is another picture of what God has done for his people—for you and me. It’s important to recognize that the filthy garments represent sin. That’s why when the angel says to remove the filthy garments from Joshua, the next thing he says is, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you” (v. 4). As believers, our sin has been removed. I’ve mentioned before that apocalyptic literature takes truths we know from other places in Scripture and presents them in vivid, visual imagery. Well, take your sin that you can call to mind and feel so ashamed of. Now, imagine that the sin is a garment of filth, draped over you. Now, picture the Lord removing that filthy garment and saying, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you.” That’s what has happened if you’ve repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ. You do not have to wear your sin around as a filthy garment. It’s been removed. But that’s not all.

It’s not as if Joshua merely had his sin removed. He was clothed with pure vestments. This is a picture again of what the Lord does for his people. It’s not just that he removes our sins. We’re credited with Christ’s perfect righteousness. Again, it’s as if the Lord takes the perfect righteousness of Christ and puts it on you like clean and pure vestments. So, it’s not just that you don’t have to go around wearing your sin; you’re clothed with Christ’s perfect righteousness.

Can you see then why Satan doesn’t have a leg to stand on as he accuses us? Sure, on our own, we’re guilty, clothed with the filth of our sin. But in Christ, the one who set his affection on us before the foundation of the world and called us to himself has removed our sin and credited us with Christ’s perfect righteousness. What is there to say? Again, to quote from Romans 8, “It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (v. 33-34). And yet the good news doesn’t stop there. God transforms his people to walk in obedience.

God transforms his people to walk in obedience

In the first five verses, you'll notice that Joshua isn't addressed. The Lord speaks to Satan and rebukes him, and one angel tells another to remove Joshua's filthy clothes and clothe him with pure ones. But in verse 6 we're finally told that the angel of the Lord speaks to Joshua. And in light of all the good news Joshua has heard prior to this about himself, you might think the Lord might say, "Look how blessed you are," or something like that. But interestingly, he speaks to him about obedience. We read, "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'" (vv. 6-7).

Here, God is holding out to Joshua the blessing of continuing in his role as priest, ruling, and having access to the prophets who stand in the council of the Lord. And yet, this might make us feel anxious. We might ask, "What if Joshua fails to obey? Could he ruin everything?" After all, this is a conditional promise, isn't it? The Lord says, "*If* you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, *then* . . ." But I don't think we're supposed to read this and feel anxiety. I say that for multiple reasons. First, note that as Zechariah tells us the angel of the Lord spoke to Joshua, he doesn't just say, "He spoke." Rather, he says that he "solemnly assured Joshua." In other words, this wasn't to create doubt and uncertainty.

But, second, we're to understand, that in light of the blessings that have come to Joshua in verses 1-5—being chosen by God, called to God, having his sin removed, and being clothed in pure vestments as righteousness—he's now equipped to walk in obedience. After all, this is the same pattern we see with Isaiah, for example. In the text we opened the service reading (Isaiah 6:1-8), we see a similar pattern. Isaiah is in the Lord's presence, his sin is exposed, the Lord removes his sin, and the result is that Isaiah heart is eager to obey the Lord, saying, "Here am I. Send me." This is what happens in the life of a believer.

To be certain, our salvation is a work of God, as we've seen. God sets his affection on us, calls us, removes our sin, and credits us with righteousness. But once he does this work in us, it transforms us. He frees us from sin's dominion and empowers us to obey him from our hearts. This was, in fact, one of the very promises of the new covenant, that he'd take out from his people their hearts of stone, and give them hearts of flesh, a new spirit, and his Holy Spirit so that he might cause us to walk in his ways. That's why we say that though we're justified by faith alone, justifying faith never comes alone. It's followed by a transformed life. Our desires themselves change. We want to obey the Lord. That's why this word wasn't to unsettle Joshua but was a word of assurance. The Lord who'd done the miraculous work in verses 1-5 would continue to equip him to walk in faithfulness. And he does the same for us. It's much like the Lord assuring us in Ephesians 2:10 that he's created good works for us to walk in. God transforms his people to walk in obedience. And, finally, in the last few verses, we're reminded that all of this is possible because of Christ and his work.

All of this is possible because of Christ and his work

Near the end of the vision, the Lord says something interesting to Joshua. In verses 8-10 he says, "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."

What's interesting about this glorious scene is that the Lord ends it telling Joshua and his friends with him laboring for the restoration of the city, the temple, and worship, are merely signs, types, or pictures of what's to come. What does that mean? Well, throughout these entire visions, there's been talk of building the temple, for example. And yet it's been clear that the temple that would be rebuilt in the sixth century BC was only a type or picture of the new Jerusalem to come. Now, the Lord is saying that the same is true with Joshua himself.

If the temple was going to be rebuilt, the sacrificial system needed to be restored, and that required a high priest like Joshua. But sinful high priests like Joshua and the blood of bulls and goats (as needed as they were) were never meant to be sufficient. The author of Hebrews tells us that we always should have seen that there was more to come. After all, if their sacrifices truly removed sins, then why would they need to be offered again and again every year. We needed another high priest to come and offer a sacrifice for sins once for all.

That's the one the Lord tells Zechariah is coming—the Branch. And this language isn't unfamiliar to us. We know that the Lord promised his eternal king would come from David's line. And when the exile happened and it looked like this promise was cut off, like a tree being cut down to a stump, the Lord assured his people that despite the apparent hopelessness, this promised king from David's line was still coming. He said in Isaiah 11:1, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." Well, the Lord reminds Zechariah, this branch is coming. And when he comes, he'll come as our high priest. I think that's noted in the reference to the seven-eyed stone (which I think meant seven-faced stone). Just as the high priest wore stones to show he was representing the tribes of Israel, so the Lord will have this seven-faced stone to show that he represents the whole of his people, and he'll wipe away his people's sin in one day.

That day happened on a Friday as Jesus, hanging on the cross, said, "It is finished" and died for us, offering himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. And as he rose from the grave, we can know for certain that trusting in him is not a hopeless endeavor. We truly can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Brothers and sisters, as unusual as this heavenly vision might seem, these realities shouldn't be. We too have one who loves to accuse us. Even this morning, the enemy may be whispering reminders to you of your sin and unworthiness. But remember this vision. Remember that our Lord himself loves you and set his affection on you before the foundation of the world and then called you to himself by opening your eyes to the gospel. Remember that he has removed the

filth of your sin and credited you with the righteousness of his dear Son. In fact, the next time Satan accuses you, open your Bibles to Zechariah 3 and start reading, putting yourself in the place of Joshua. After all, as a high priest, that was his role—to stand as a representative for his people. Actually, just picture the greater high priest—Jesus—representing you, and remind the enemy that if he wants to accuse you, he will have to take that up with Jesus. After all, if God is for us, who can be against us? If God has justified us through Christ, who can condemn us? How glorious is that! So let's come to the table and give thanks this morning. Amen.