

"THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS"

There is a profound association in the human heart between the idea of being clean and being good, being clean and being well, and whole and healthy, not just physically but spiritually, psychologically, morally and emotionally. That association is ancient. It's in every culture. It goes very deep. It is in all our hearts and all through the Bible.

In my studies I've come across multiple articles demonstrating this connection. One study at the University of Toronto involved asking volunteers to think about sketchy things they had done in the past like shoplifting or betraying a friend. After that when an opportunity was presented to wash their hands or to use hand wipes those who had remembered and imagined past moral failures jumped at the offer at twice the rate of study subjects who had not. On the other hand when people washed their hands before filling out a questionnaire about issues related to moral purity they had an elevated sense of morality. In the book, *The Righteous Mind*, by Jonathan Haidt, he references the study from Toronto and concludes, *immorality makes us feel physically dirty, and cleansing ourselves can sometimes make us more concerned about guarding our moral purity.*"¹ Here's the thing: there is something woven into our spiritual and emotional make-up, that associates being good, and well and healthy with being washed, and clean, and pure.

What we have to struggle with is that this longing to be clean on the inside can never be satisfied by any washing on the outside. It is against this background that the promises of the Bible about what is accomplished, by the death of Jesus, for those who believe in him, stand out so strongly. For instance, in **1 John 1:7** the Bible says *the blood of Jesus, his (God's) son, cleanses us from all sin*. So this Palm Sunday weekend we're going to look at a somewhat strange story from **Zechariah 3**. This chapter relates a vision given to the prophet Zechariah. Maybe because it is not well known it can give us a fresh perspective on one of the central truths of the gospel. It's the truth that ***The sacrificial death of Jesus can fully cleanse you from, everything that defiles you. You've got to truly trust in him so you can freely live before him.***

I. THE UNCOMFORTABLE THING WE HAVE TO FACE IS THAT WE ALL DEEPLY NEED TO BE CLEANSED.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [1]: Inserted: o

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [2]: Deleted:a

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [3]: Deleted:a

That's part of the message from **Zechariah 3**. Zechariah was a priest who was also a prophet. He began his ministry about 520 years before Christ. Zechariah received eight night visions full of vivid symbolism. Chapter three is one of them. In **Zechariah 3:1** he sees *Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. Verses 2-4* say, *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?"*³ *Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.*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 have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."* The picture is filthy garments the explanation is that the filth represents "iniquity" which literally means something twisted. It is one of many Hebrew words for sin.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [5]: Deleted: a

A. Our need for cleansing is real because sin is real.

In the Bible filthy clothing pictures a spiritually filthy, soiled life. **Isaiah 64:6** says, *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.* The prophet's vision simply gives you is a symbolic picture of the human condition. Many modern people push back against this – understandably – what do you do with this? It is saying that in ourselves we are unfit, not presentable or acceptable to God. People like to think, "Yeah, maybe that's how people used to feel, but we know better now." It's common for modern people to say that we don't have to feel shame or guilt, or unfit or unclean anymore because there is no God to judge us or demand a certain kind of life from us, and there isn't any absolute standard of what is right and good anyway so anything goes, and it just doesn't matter. We can say stuff like that, but our actions show we don't believe it because we are judging other people for lots of things all the time. Deep down we are also aware of the critique, the self-judgment of our own hearts. It's why we are so driven to prove ourselves and our pride is so touchy and vulnerable.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [4]: Inserted: i

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [6]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [7]: Inserted: "

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [8]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [9]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [10]: Inserted: g

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [11]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [12]: Inserted: ,

B. We try to deny the importance of this, but that doesn't work.

In **Psalms 32** David talks about how when he tried to deny or keep silent about his sin it was as if his bones were wasting away and he was groaning all the time, and his strength was dried up, and God's hand was heavy on him. It weighs on you. It works on you.

We might, not acknowledge it, or think of it as uncleanness or know *what* to call it but it is real. That's why psychologists study it. The researcher from the University of Toronto called it the *Macbeth effect*. That's taken from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth." Lady Macbeth is an ambitious young wife who pressures her husband to kill an aging king so they can take his throne. Her husband doesn't want to do it but she questions his manhood, and he gives in. Afterward, she sleepwalks, and as she does, she is continually, compulsively rubbing her hands as if she is washing them. She thinks she sees blood on them. She can't get them clean. She rubs them and says, "*out damned spot, out... hell is murky*". Nothing gives her peace. Her husband, worried for her, says to the doctor, "*Canst thou not... with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse... that perilous stuff that weighs upon her heart?*" She is haunted by guilt that feels like dirt and begs for cleansing. The reason this is a classic of English literature is that it captures a common human experience. That's why the psychologist called it *the Macbeth effect*. It isn't just for murderers. It's for all of us. Even when it doesn't rise to a level of neurotic obsession, it is a deep intuition we all share. We need to be cleansed. No one has an uncontaminated conscience or unpolluted memory. So our hearts long for true total cleansing. That's actually good because we need it.

The difficult truth we all have to face is that we deeply need to be cleansed but...

II. THE GOOD NEWS WE ALL CAN BELIEVE IS THAT WE CAN BE CLEANSED THOROUGHLY.

Look at what is pictured in **verses 4-5**: *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."*⁵ *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.* This vision is communicating something very profound by means of a picture. It is important for us to think about that and let it speak to us. We, in the modern Western world, tend to work a lot with words. The more Eastern, ancient, mindset of the Hebrew prophets often thinks and communicates in pictures. We like to define things, analyze them and delineate the different points. In the Bible, we are sometimes given a picture, a metaphor. So instead of Jesus saying, "God is very forgiving let me give you three reasons why," he tells the story of a son who wished his father dead, asked for all his money, ran off, messed up, but came back to be welcomed home with love and kisses.

- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [13]: Inserted: .
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [14]: Inserted: a
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [15]: Inserted: ,
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [16]: Inserted: ,
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [17]: Inserted: ,
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [18]: Inserted: ,
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [19]: Inserted: s
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [23]: Deleted:s
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [20]: Inserted: n
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [21]: Inserted: t
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [22]: Inserted: th
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [24]: Deleted:bec
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [25]: Deleted:use
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [26]: Deleted:.

- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [27]: Inserted: ,
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [28]: Inserted: "
- Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [29]: Deleted:"

The imagery in this prophecy is showing us that...

A. When God declares you to be clean, he is giving you a gift of pure and powerful grace.

1. The vision pictures the day of atonement. Dr. Raymond Dillard was a professor of Old Testament language and literature who often spoke about this passage. He pointed out that the fact that Zechariah sees Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD means the vision pictures “the day of atonement”. Jewish people reading Zechariah throughout the ages would understand the significance of this. The Hebrew Temple had an innermost sanctuary called “the most holy place” which, to maybe use modern words, was considered a sort of space-time-warp-portal to the throne room of God. No one could ever go in there except the high priest, and he could only go in on one day: the day of atonement. So when Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing in the presence of the LORD, he knows he is in the most holy place on the day of atonement.

2. The high priest would have moved into an apartment in the temple at the beginning of the week. The high priest was going to represent all the people in the presence of God, so he had to be presentable to God. To ensure his purity, he would leave his home and family and move into a small apartment connected to the temple a week before the day of atonement. This way he could be sure that for over a week, he wouldn't even accidentally touch anything that might make him unclean. Then he would spend the week preparing and rehearsing the rituals for the day of atonement.

3. Joshua would have stayed awake the night before. The day of atonement itself involved a full day of rituals that began at sunrise and continued to sunset. Most of us would want to be sure we got a good night's sleep. However, the high priest would stay awake the whole night before praying and preparing. Other priests would stay up with him support him and read Scripture and pray with him.

4. When the sun rose on the day of atonement, it would begin a full day of sacrifices, prayers, and washings. During the course of the day, the high priest would offer at least five sacrifices. He would take a full bath after each one, washing from head to foot. He would do this behind a linen screen but publically to assure all the people that their high priest and representative before God, was doing this properly to be presentable to God. It was essential that he be absolutely pure. In addition to these full baths, he would wash his hands and feet ten more times.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [30]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [31]: Deleted: is

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [32]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [33]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [34]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [35]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [36]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [37]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [38]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [39]: Inserted: ,

5. The clothing was symbolic. In the morning he would bathe and wash his hands and feet and put on the high priest's ceremonial vestments or robes. These were beyond intricate woven with gold, blue, purple and scarlet thread artistically worked and clasped at the shoulder with onyx stones set in gold. One ancient letter claiming to describe the high priest on the day of atonement says, "... the priest's appearance makes one awestruck and dumbfounded. A man would think he had come out of this world into another. I emphatically state that every man who comes near the spectacle of what I have described will experience astonishment and amazement beyond words, his very being transformed by the hallowed arrangement of every single detail."² This was elaborate clothing that displayed glory and beauty. In this, he would offer the morning sacrifice.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [40]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [41]: Inserted: s

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [42]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [43]: Deleted:ab

6. After the morning offering, he would change into clothes he would only wear on the day of atonement. These were the opposite of his elaborate high priest's clothing. He would put on the clothes he would only wear on the day of atonement. Simple, unadorned but fine and flawlessly white linen. Symbolic of his purity. Dressed in the pure white linen the high priest would perform three more sacrifices. Then the high priest would begin several trips into the most holy place to offer prayers and the blood of the sacrifice for the atonement to cover the sins of the people. This was a long day in which the focus was on the necessity for the high priest to be presentable, pure, acceptable to God - clean in every single way.³

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [44]: Deleted:i

7. In light of this can you imagine the emotional impact on Zechariah when he sees Joshua the high priest in the presence of God clothed in filthy clothes. The Hebrew word "filthy" is strong. It literally means soiled with feces. It's an ugly picture of disgusting urine and feces filthiness. What is the point? God was showing Zechariah and us that this is what our best representative, on his best day, after his best efforts, looks like in the presence of God and his holy purity. We are not clean, far from it. Some people say morality is relative. Well consider this, relative to me you may be purer, or I may be purer but relative to God none of us is anywhere near clean and pure of heart. **Isaiah 64:6** says, *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.* In the vision Satan, the accuser is standing there accusing him, and the reality is plain to see and undeniable: he is *not* acceptable or presentable. If anyone appeared before a king like this, it would be such an act of disrespect for the king and all he represents that a terrible death would be the expected punishment.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [45]: Inserted: r

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [46]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [47]: Inserted: ,

What happens in the vision? **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 have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."* Verse four makes clear that those filthy garments represent the iniquity of the people, but instead of judgment, he takes it away. The filthy garments are taken off Joshua, and then, he is clothed and crowned with pure vestments.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [48]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [49]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [50]: Inserted: ose

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [53]: Deleted:at

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [51]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [52]: Inserted: ,

This beautiful and powerful picture of grace ties right into Palm Sunday. What we have to understand today is that...

B. The cleansing God gives us comes through the sacrifice of Jesus.

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 (a symbol): behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.* This is a title for the Messiah, Jesus who is a branch from the root of David. (Jeremiah 33:15, Isaiah 11:1, Acts 2:30) **Verse 9,** *For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, (this part is hard, but one view is that this is a gemstone for the turban with seven facets) I will engrave its inscription, (On the turban of the high priest "holy to the LORD" was engraved on a gold plate) declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.* When Jesus died on the cross God dealt with sin in a single day. Jesus took our sin on himself and cleansed us from it by paying the penalty for it.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [54]: Inserted: M

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [55]: Inserted: ,

The names Joshua and Jesus are essentially the same. They mean Salvation is from the Lord. Before his sacrifice, Jesus, like Joshua had a week of preparation. He came on Palm Sunday and they quoted the words of the prophet Zechariah. **Zechariah 9:9** *Reioice areatlv. O dauhter of Zion! Shout aloud. O dauhter of Jerusalem! Behold. your kina is comina to vou: riehteous and havina salvation is he. humble and mounted on a donkev. on a colt. the foal of a donkev.* The night before his sacrifice he staved up all night. But no one staved up with him to support him or pray with him. While he was praying those closest to him, all fell asleep, betrayed or denied him. The only robe he was given was given to mock him. The only turban with which he was crowned was a crown of thorns. Instead of being cleansed and clothed he was spit on and stripped. He was beaten and nailed to the cross to be the sacrifice. All the crap, all the filth, and sins of the world was placed on him. **Isaiah 53:6:**... *the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Jesus took bore the penalty for our sins and filth so that we could be cleansed and clothed in the perfection of his

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [56]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [57]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [58]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [59]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM
Comment [60]: Inserted: ,

grace. God is the only judge who matters. Accept the cleansing he offers

The sacrificial death of Jesus can fully cleanse you from, everything that defiles you. You've got to truly trust in him so you can fully live before him. Listen to how the book of Hebrews sums it up. **Hebrews 1:1-3** *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.* He is Jesus, the true and better Joshua whose sacrificial death brings full and total cleansing for all who trust in him. What did he do? He made purification for sins. Why did he sit down? Because it is finished. What is there left for you to do to be cleansed? Not a single thing except to humbly accept your need for his cleansing and to trust in him as your Savior to cleanse you. You are in trouble if you don't get this.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [61]: Deleted:l

C. We are cleansed by grace so that we can live in his presence.

Joshua is given a task and a promise. Look at **verses 6-7**. *And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, ⁷ "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.* The cleansing comes first as the gift of grace, and that gives you the standing, the identity, the confidence in which to carry out your task of walking in God's ways. And with that comes the promise of access to God and his presence and help. At the end comes a final promise. **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."* The cleansing leads to peace and fruitfulness – the vine and fig tree - but it is the kind of peace and fruitfulness in which your greatest joy is to share it with others.

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [62]: Inserted: s

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [63]: Inserted: ,

Grammarly 3/24/2018 3:48 PM

Comment [64]: Deleted:z

Conclusion

Take the cleansing that comes through Jesus. Claim it. Claim this cleansing and in that confidence walk before God and share his goodness and the grace he has given you through Jesus.

Amen.

¹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, p. 71

² (*Letter of Aristeas* 96–99, in *OTP*, 2:19.)

³ Some of the details outlined here are from Scripture, esp Leviticus but some are taken from Raymond's Dillard's study of extra biblical Jewish sources that describe the actual practices that became customary for the Day of Atonement. These practices and traditions would shape how the people in ancient times read and understood Zechariah's vision. One of Dr. Dillard's lectures/Chapel talks, titled, "The Gospel According to Zechariah" can be found here: <http://media1.wts.edu/media/audio/rbd105-2-copyright.mp3>