

This morning we are continuing in our sermon series “The Power of One Life,” looking at the lives of minor Biblical characters whose life I can preach on in one Sunday. Today, we are going to look at a man known as Joshua the high priest – not the Joshua who succeeded Moses and whose life is outlined in the book of Joshua. Joshua the high priest, who is introduced to us in the book of Haggai, helped to rebuild the temple after the exiles returned from captivity in Babylon, according to Ezra 5:1-2. He was the first high priest in the temple after the return from exile.

In Zechariah 3, the prophet Zechariah has a vision about Joshua the high priest, and that is the section I want to focus on today. We’ll go a little at a time, and I will offer some explanation along the way that will help us understand what this passage means for us today.

***Zechariah 3:1-9** - 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.*

Zechariah the prophet has a vision, where he sees the high priest, Joshua, standing in the holy of holies before the angel of the Lord. The holy of holies was the innermost section of the temple, where the Ark of the Covenant was, where the presence of God was in the midst of His people. The only time the high priest was allowed in to the holy of holies was once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This was the day that the high priest would go in and offer sacrifices for the people of Israel. He would enter the Holy of Holies as a **representative** of the entire nation of Israel. It was the biggest day of the calendar. And the preparation for this day was very detailed. A week before Yom Kippur, the high priest would be taken away from his home and put in seclusion. The reason is that so he wouldn’t accidentally touch or eat anything that was considered unclean. Clean food would be brought to him, and he’d wash his body regularly and prepare his heart to go before God.

If you’ve ever read through Leviticus, you know that cleanness was very important in the old covenant that was made between God and Moses at Mt. Sinai. According to the old covenant, many things could make you unclean – touching a dead animal or human, an infectious skin disease, contact with mildew, bodily discharge, and eating from the meat of an unclean animal, among other things. And if you were unclean, then you couldn’t enter the temple and worship for a short time, and sometimes you might even need to be separated from the rest of the community. What was the purpose of these laws? **They were a visual aid to remind the people that they were spiritually and morally unclean and couldn’t enter the presence of**

God without was spiritual purification. As you purified your body, you were supposed to think about how you needed to purify yourself spiritually to enter the presence of a Holy God. If this seems foreign to you, it may be helpful to think about what you do if you're going on an important date. You clean yourself, don't you? You make sure that there is no stain, nothing dirty about you, because you want to be clean for the other person. **It can also be helpful to think about other spiritual disciplines, and how an outward physical action can be meant to represent an inward posture towards God.** Two examples: we fast in order to get in touch with our spiritual hunger. And we kneel in order to put ourselves in a position of humility. So that was the purpose of the clean laws.

The night before the Day of Atonement, the high priest wouldn't go to bed, but would stay up all night praying and reading God's Word in order to purify his soul. Then on the Day of Atonement, he would bathe head to toe and dress in pure, unstained linen. He would go into the holy of holies and offer an animal sacrifice to God to atone for his own sins. Then he would come out, bathe again, and put on new white linen, before reentering the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice for the sins of the priests. After that, he would come out a third time, bathe again from head to toe, and dress in brand new linen, before going in one last time to atone for the sins of all the people.

And believe it or not, all of this would be done in public (the bathing would be behind a screen), so that the people could watch and cheer him on as he represented the people before God. The greatest concern was that the high priest would be as clean and pure as possible before the Lord, for he was representing the people.

With that background, continue reading Zechariah 3:

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.

You know those nightmares where you go to school and you're naked? This is that times 1000. With all I just told you about the Day of Atonement, consider this picture. The high priest, Joshua, is standing before the angel of the Lord in the Holy of Holies, and he is dressed in filthy clothes. **Filthy is a reference in Hebrew to excrement.** His clothes are absolutely defiled in the worst possible way. And Satan is standing there accusing him before the Lord.

This is the most pure person in his purest form on the biggest day of the year. The crowd is cheering him on, the presence of God is before him... and in Zechariah's vision, Joshua the high priest is covered in excrement before a holy God. And Satan stands nearby accusing him before the Lord. What might you be feeling if you were Joshua?

Shame? Guilt? Unclean? Dirty? Exposed? Accused? Anxious? Afraid? In despair?

Imagine if on the screen behind me was broadcast your secret thoughts, everything you've done. What would show up on this screen? Would people see your secret addictions? Would they see your murderous thoughts? Your lusting after people that you are not married to? Would they see what you have done? The abortion you had. The abuse you doled out on your loved ones? The lying. The stealing. The cheating. The times you spread gossip about other people. If our heart and thoughts and past were displayed up here on the screen, we would be mortified at what we have done and what we think and what we do. And we hear the voice of Satan accusing us before God as people who are unworthy to stand before our holy God. It would feel like a torturous death to be exposed like that.

If I had to sum up the first few verses, I would put it this way: **Despite my best attempts to clean myself up, I can not get rid of my guilt and my shame, nor can I silence the accusing voices.**

Let me define guilt and shame.

Guilt – I did something bad. I have fallen short. You mistreated your wife. You abused your children. You lied. You cheated. You stole. Guilt is accompanied by the threat of judgment.

Shame – I am bad. I am a failure. I am dirty. I am not enough. I am worthless. I hate myself. There is something fundamentally wrong with me. Shame is a deep sense of filthy defilement. Standing before the crowd, and before the holy God, covered in garments of excrement.

Guilt and shame are different. Often they go together, but sometimes you can feel shame despite the fact that you did nothing wrong, or you can feel guilt without it turning into shame.

Despite my best attempts to clean myself up, I can not get rid of my guilt and my shame, nor can I silence the accusing voices.

So how do you get rid of guilt and shame?

How do you deal with your guilt? You mistreated your wife. You abused your children. You lied. You cheated. You stole.

Hide it, ignore it, bury it down.

Blame others – I wouldn't have done it if it weren't for them

Rationalize it away – it wasn't that bad, it's not as bad as him, I'm getting better

Try to make up for it by being good – do good works to atone for it

How do you deal with your shame?

Hide it, ignore it, deny it, don't let anyone see it. Isolate yourself. Avoid intimate relationships. Dress up and put on a brave and happy face. Build a fortress around your heart.

Lash out at others. Become a bully. Bring others down. Make others feel shame in the hopes of making yourself feel better. Sabotage relationships that should be places of refuge

Act out. Be compulsive. Get drunk. Use drugs. Sleep around. Overwork. Undereat.

Try to overcompensate by finding value in something else. Other men. In being successful. In being a good person. In being beautiful.

Or maybe you just can't deal with it, and it leads you into deep depression and suicidal thoughts.

All the while the accusing voices won't go away: You are a failure. You are worthless. You will never be good enough. Nobody loves you. Nobody wants you. If they knew who you really were, they would run screaming.

Maybe these work a little bit. **But I would argue that we are like Joshua: despite our best efforts we can't clean ourselves.** Self-help doesn't work. We can't get rid of our guilt and shame on our own.

We need someone from the outside to come in and heal us and pronounce us forgiven, to call us clean.

In spite of all our efforts to be pure, to cleanse ourselves, this is the condition of our hearts before the Lord. We stand before the Lord defiled, unclean, and Satan is there accusing us. Do you really think bathing three times is going to really make us right before God?

Our hearts are unclean before the Lord.

Isaiah 64:6 - All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Are you feeling the guilt and the shame? **Take heart. This is how the rest of the scene goes:**

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 rich 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. ⁶ The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: ⁷ "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.' ⁸ "Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. ⁹ See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

What does the Lord do?

1) He takes away Joshua's guilt

He tells him that he will remove the sin of the land in a single day through his servant, the Branch. What does that refer to?

Jeremiah 33:14-17 - "The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵ "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from

David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.' ¹⁷ For this is what the LORD says: 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel

Also found in Isaiah 11:1-2 and Jeremiah 23:5-6. The branch is a descendant of David who will be the everlasting king. You see, **Joshua has the same name in Hebrew – Yeshua – as another person, Jesus.** And whereas the high priest was filthy before the Lord, there was another high priest, Jesus, who went through His own day of atonement. He also began preparation a week beforehand, when he entered Jerusalem. He also didn't sleep the night before his big day. But instead of being cheered, Jesus, our high priest, was betrayed and abandoned by all who knew him. Instead of being clothed in rich garments, he was stripped naked, beaten, and killed. Instead of being bathed in clean water, He was bathed in human spit.

And as Zechariah hears, he will take away the sin of the land in a single day through His death on the cross.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*

He takes away our guilt and gives us His righteousness. Now we are rightly-related to God. Justified. As if we'd never sinned at all. Spotless before the throne. There is forgiveness for any sin in Christ, as He takes away our guilt.

Romans 8:1-2 - *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

2) He takes away Joshua's shame

He puts rich garments and a clean turban on him. There is no more defilement.

How did Jesus take away our shame? By entering into the shame of this world:

Isaiah 53:3 - *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

He went through the ridicule, the rejection. He was innocent but shamed.

Hebrews 13:12-13 - And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

He was nailed naked to the cross outside the city gates. Exposed and humiliated.

FF Bruce – *To die by crucifixion was to plumb to the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute; the dignity of the Roman name would be besmirched by being brought into association with anything as vile as the cross.*

But despite this, he rejected the shame:

Hebrews 12:2-3 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

He scorned the shame. He was not concerned about it, not controlled by it. He rejected it. He bore our shame on the cross in order to heal us and transform our story.

In Jesus, God takes away our guilt and our shame. But what about silencing the voices of accusation? How do we scorn the shame? How can we reach a point where it bounces off us and does not affect us?

3) He gives Joshua a new identity, and a new purpose

I think we see in this passage how to scorn shame. We need a new identity and purpose. God gives Joshua rich garments. A new turban. A new identity, not based on anything about you.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Romans 8:15-16 - *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

Think of the messages that shame tells you: I am bad. I am a failure. I am dirty. I am not enough. I am worthless. I hate myself. There is something fundamentally wrong with me.

At the cross, God proclaims to you: You are loved. You are worth so much. You are my beloved child, created in my image.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 - *I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.*

Think of Honus Wagner. This baseball card sold for 3.12 million dollars in 2016. What makes this card worth so much? The price someone is willing to pay for it. How do you know your worth? Because of the price the God of the universe was willing to pay. Top dollar. His own Son for you. And he did it by becoming our sin. By being shamed. All out of love for you.

Hebrews 12:2 - *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The joy set before Him was you – the only thing He did not have in heaven. You are not damaged goods. You are His precious daughter, or His beloved son, worth the shame of the cross. He gives Joshua, and us, a new identity – beloved. And now when the accusations come, He is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us:

Romans 8:33-34 - *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? 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.*

But he gives more than identity; he also gives purpose.

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

I believe this is critical to overcoming shame and silencing the voice of the accuser. Through the gospel, God has the power to change your story. Think about it. What is the story in which you find yourself? A story of shame or guilt? Of abuse and loss? Or are you in a story of redemption and restoration and grace? Like a stick snatched from the fire, he has rescued you, though you may be singed. **Because of Jesus, the cross, this object of shame and torture, has become an object of beauty**, something we adorn ourselves with and thank God for. We sang "The wonderful cross" this morning – can you imagine singing "the wonderful electric chair"? But God has transformed the meaning of the cross! And God can do the same with your life, taking the pain that was caused to you and bringing something good out of it.

Genesis 50:20 - *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

What others meant for evil, God will use for good, for the saving of many lives.

He will give a purpose. To Joshua, he said "Go and be my priest." He says the same to us: Go and bring others back to me. Go and bring hope to others. God will not waste anything, but use it all for His glory and the salvation of others. We do have to be ashamed any more, for in Christ everything will be part of His story of redemption. Perhaps someday we will be able to even boast in it:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Jeremiah 17:14 - *Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.*

In a single day, Lord, remove our guilt and shame.