

The Priest with Dirty Clothes

Have you ever accidentally picked up a stick or log by an old fire only to realize that it had turned to charcoal? Ugh! Unless you drop everything and thoroughly clean your hands, you will stain everything you touch. Removing that char from anything can be really difficult to get off and sometimes, no matter what you do, it leaves permanent soot stains on your favorite piece of clothing or anything else it comes in contact with. I imagine this was the imagery pictured by God in the vision he revealed to Zechariah as described below:

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. 2 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." 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. (Zech 3:1-5)

Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord (aka Jesus). In his role as high priest, Joshua would have stood before the Lord as a representative head in the stead of the people of God. In a sense, you could say he was the people of God. And the picture was not a pretty one. If I follow the logic rightly, he was filthy from head to toe having just been snatched from the fire. To make things worse, Satan stood at his right hand, in the position of a legal accuser, making sure the stains were emphasized in all their gory detail. If you know your biblical history, you know that there was sin and lawlessness aplenty to highlight...no need to create a false narrative. I can picture Joshua covered in soot, the clothes unsalvageable, unpresentable.

There seemingly was no hope for Joshua. The accusations were true. He was far filthier than even Pigpen from the Charlie Brown cartoons...soiled in excrement would be closer to the sense of things. And the stains ran as deep as the charcoal found in a fully fired log.

But praise be to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! He did not snatch Joshua from the fire to leave him in his filth, smoldering at the edge of the fire to slowly flicker out and die. The humanly insurmountable stain was superintended by the unstoppable power of the heavenly Lord and Savior. Joshua's filthy clothes were removed, his iniquity taken away by the Lord himself. His clothes were not cleansed but rather replaced by pure vestments. Even the crown of his head was restored with a clean turban. What a stunning vision of the mercy of God.

We too know share in the joy and wonder of what it means to be made acceptable to God through Christ's righteous gift. Here is one of the many reminders from the Book of Hebrews.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Heb 10:11-14)

So when your filth weighs heavy and the stain of sin clings closely, look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith. Remember, he sits at the right hand of God even now, not to accuse, but to proclaim your purity, for you also have been clothed by him in pure vestments, if you are trusting in his finished work on the cross. Look to him who endured such hostility from sinners so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. He is your hope for today!

Brothers and sisters, my prayer is that you will indeed hope in him today as you rejoice while comfortably clothed by him.

Pastor Brad

PS. RC Sproul wrote a children's book entitled, "The Priest with Dirty Clothes". His desire was to share this beautiful Gospel story envisioned in Zechariah 3:1-5 in a way that children could better understand. If you are looking for a new story for your kids (or grandkids), I would encourage you to check it out!