

“Plucked From the Fire!”

Zechariah 3:1–10

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Zechariah 3:1–2 says [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. [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?”*

This is God’s Word.

On February 9, 1709 sometime after 11pm a pastor’s family of eight and several workers who lived with them woke to screams of ‘Fire! Fire in the house!’ There was no time to get dressed or gather possessions and panic struck. The parents and workers began to gather up the children. One of the workers ran into the nursery, grabbed the youngest who was one year old and yelled for five year old Jackie to get out of the house. All rushed out of the house but to the father’s horror little Jackie was missing. He tried several times to go back in but was unable to do so. Then the father fell on the ground to his knees weeping and committed his little five year old son to the Lord but just about that time little Jackie emerged from a window on the second floor, having no time to get a ladder one man jumped on the shoulders of another and grabbed Jackie’s hands. As soon as he snatched Jackie out of the window the whole roof collapsed. The whole house burned down but Jackie and all the others were saved and safe.

Years later whenever Jackie (whose name was actually John) was asked about this terrifying incident or to summarize how he would like to be remembered his remarkable life, he simply responded with this epitaph that he wrote in his journal; Here lies the body of John Wesley, a brand plucked from the burning, a man saved for a purpose. As many of you know John Wesley’s purpose was to start a ministry that one day would become the United Methodist Church, but we’re going to look at an even more amazing rescue in Zechariah 3 in this study.

In the book of Zechariah the Prophet received a series of eight night visions meant to call God’s people to repentance, faithful service and to worship God in all of His greatness. I loved how Pastor Reeder described this chapter. He said ‘It is a beautiful redemptive picture of the Gospel and our victory in Jesus Christ.’ It is a powerful testimony to the amazing grace of God. Zechariah is what we call a post exilic prophet and that’s because the events that were taking place here were almost 20 years after the Jews had returned from the exile at the hands of the Babylonians. So this is taking place around 520 B.C. The rebuilding of the temple had stopped and the sense of God’s people at this time was discouragement over their sin which led them into the exile. I’m sure they wondered if God would ever be kind to them again.

In Zechariah 3 we see the fourth vision of eight where Satan presents himself also to add insult to injury. Satan wanted God to know how sinfully filthy they were starting with Joshua the high priest and how totally unworthy they were of God’s favor. That is the backdrop to where we will be in this study and I’d like to highlight three principles that we can use against Satan’s cruel and ruthless accusations against us. The three principles are simply we need to be aware of his schemes, live in light of God’s saving grace and then keep our focus on the bruised branch.

To be aware of Satan’s schemes Zechariah 3:1 says [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.* This is not the Joshua of Moses’ time in the exodus from Egypt for that was about a

thousand years before this time but this is Joshua the high priest who performs his priestly duties as a representative of God's people after the exile. The next character in this verse is the angel of the Lord and that is Jesus Christ Himself, the second Person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Son of God.

This is an incredible scene for Joshua is standing in the presence of God Almighty, one of the highest privileges for any child of God to experience, but it's the third character in this scene that turns this scene into a most disturbing one – Satan, the diabolical arch enemy of God and His people. In this courtroom scene Satan is accusing Joshua the high priest before a holy God, the Judge of all the earth and we see tremendous panic that is going on. All of Satan's schemes and deceptive practices are meant to ruin our souls and bring dishonor to the glory of God.

I want to focus on one of Satan's schemes and that is Satan as an accuser. Revelation 12:10 says [10] *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."* Satan is the accuser of the brethren and accuses us day and night before the throne. He is continually telling us and God how horrible we are because of our sins. This is the work of the one that Jesus calls the father of lies.

It's interesting to note that whenever the father of lies speaks to God about us he speaks truth. It's odd that the father of lies is speaking truth or at least making true statements about us to God but it makes sense, doesn't it? It would be futile for the father of lies to spread his lies to the One who is called Faithful and True to the One who perfectly and effortlessly has knowledge of all things both possible and actual. God easily sees through the deceptive lies and truths of Satan. Unfortunately we don't tend to do so, but Satan's truthful statements about us to God is what we call slander. That is because Satan uses truth for no good purpose for they are meant to bring about false conclusions or used in a deceptive manner. Diabolos is the Greek word for Devil and it means slanderer or accuser.

Yet the father of lies usually speaks lies to us to keep us from embracing God's truth. What do I mean by this? He may say to you 'God could never love you more because you're a miserable sinner. You sin way too much for Him to be able to ever forgive you again.' All of these are lies of the devil meant to cause us to doubt God's truth.

The protestant reformer Martin Luther while he was hiding in Wartburg Castle in Germany was often plagued with thoughts of the devil and his accusations. On one particular night Luther had a horrible nightmare in which he saw Satan come to him with a list of all of Luther's sins and he began to go over them one by one. Satan accused and mocked Luther and told him he would ultimately end up in hell. Luther awoke suddenly, grabbed an ink well from his desk and threw it in the direction Satan was in his dream and it hit the wall and splattered. Then Luther said 'It's all true Satan and many more sins which I've committed in my life which are known to God only but write this at the bottom of your list; the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.' Amen.

We don't know if this was true or a legend but it shows us how to answer his lies as well as his misuse of truth in his attempts to doubt God's Word. So this is how we counter Satan's lies and slander, by claiming God's truth and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us practice them for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins.

My youngest child recently graduated from college and started a new job that is seven hours away from our home, her friends and her boyfriend. We were talking the other night and said 'Satan really gets me with fear and doubts. I fear losing God even though I know I can't

lose Him and my salvation is secure. I fear that I will develop doubts and one day walk away from the Lord. That is why I memorize and claim God's promises continually and I really have had more faith than fear this week. I really have had more peace than doubt.' Amen. My mom likes to say we need to have verses to hang on to when we are struggling and we need to repeat them over and over again. This is what it means to rely on the ability of God's Word, trusting His Spirit to strengthen us against our battles, lies and accusations of Satan.

My second principle is we need to live in light of God's saving grace. How do we do that? I can think of three ways from this section. One we are to be always remembering. Secondly, we're to be regularly reflecting. Thirdly, we're to be daily resolving. These three things are found in Zechariah 3:2-7. So let's start with the first one.

One we are to be always remembering and never forgetting God's extraordinary rescuing of us. Zechariah 3:2 says [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?"* This verse is all about the power of God's extraordinary rescue of sinners and not at all about sinners' attempts to rescue themselves. God is the one who rebukes Satan and rescues Joshua. God chose Joshua, Jerusalem and you if you belong to Him as His child.

We are nothing but filthy clothed sinners amazingly chosen and rescued by a holy God. Like Joshua, we are brands plucked from the flaming fires of hell and God's judgment and it's all because of His grace. It's really important for us to remember this because Satan is very powerful, more powerful than any human being relying on their own power. God's Word says that Satan is the prince of demons, the god of this world and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Satan is powerful but our God is all powerful and Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (I John 4:4). We are fragile burning sticks without Christ but we are more than conquerors with Him. We need to remind ourselves and others of this truth over and over again.

Recently my son felt conquered and he called to tell me about it. He shared with me that he was experiencing a lot of doubts. So I did what any good Christian father would do; I began lecturing him telling him all the things he needed to start doing and stop doing to fix his problems. I didn't love him well during this time. I didn't remind him of God's extraordinary rescue of him, of His eternal love, protection and power. God convicted me of that so the next day as I was thinking of how I mishandled the situation with me son and as I was studying for this I was drawn to a verse in Jude 1:23 which says [23] *save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.* But what caught my eye was the verse right before it which said [22] *And have mercy on those who doubt.*

I did not show mercy on my son in the midst of his doubts. I didn't remind him of the mercies of God which are new every morning. I didn't pray with him. I didn't remind him that he was plucked from the fire and that all these truths with God's power can restore and preserve him, even if weeping endures for the night the shout of joy will come in the morning. That is what my son needed and that's what we need too.

Then we need to be regularly reflecting on our righteous robes. Zechariah 3:3-5 says [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.*

They put on him clean clothes from head to toe. God removes Joshua's filthy clothes with perfect, righteous, spotless robes. This is so profound. Joshua's robes of wretchedness were replaced with Jesus' robes of righteousness. Chris Frost one of our elders often tells this story of coming home one day in a suit and one of his daughter's at the time was less than two and had a major blowout. Now those of you who have had children have experienced this horrible stinking mess before. His wife was doing something else and his daughter came running up to him with her arms out to him. He reached up and grabbed her and held her at arm's length. This was a cleanup that would have to be done with all out Baptist emersion not a Presbyterian sprinkling. She needed to be clean for him to bring her close to him so he began to take off his jacket and shirt and placed her in the water as he cleaned her completely in the bathtub. He put sweet smelling lotion on her and then cradled her close to his heart as he hugged her like a loving father. This is like a picture of our heavenly Father.

The Hebrew word for filthy used in Zechariah 3:3 is known as human excrement. This is not a pretty picture. This occasion was that Joshua's sins smelled awful in the nostrils of God Almighty and were viewed in the worst possible light through the penetrating eyes of a perfectly just and holy God. Joshua had to be clean and accepted to be brought close to God's heart and the same is true with us. Revelation 7:14b says *[14b] They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* Hebrews 10:22 says *[22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

I love what Matthew Henry says about this in his commentary on Zechariah 3. He says, 'Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua's garments, yet did not put him away. Thus God by his grace does with those whom he chooses to be priests to himself. The guilt of sin is taken away by pardoning mercy, and the power of it is broken by renewing grace. Thus Christ washes those from their sins in his own blood, whom he makes kings and priests to our God. Those whom Christ makes spiritual priests, are clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness, and appear before God in that; and with the graces of his Spirit, which are ornaments to them.' God put our filthy robes away and replaced them with His robes of righteousness. These robes of righteousness can never be soiled again, never wear out and can never be removed throughout all eternity. It is what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:21, *[21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The really fascinating thing in Zechariah 3:5 is the turban. This is the headdress worn by the priest and you can read all about the elaborate priestly duties with this in Exodus 28. I love the fact that the turban had an engraved plate on it with words written on it that said 'Holy to the Lord.' Christian that is how God sees you today from top to bottom. He sees you as He sees His beloved Son and He sees you holy to the Lord. Your name and His title is graven on His hands and heart forever.

You may be thinking 'I don't feel holy to the Lord or accepted by Him and I certainly can't imagine Him seeing me as He sees His Son' that's because your feelings are lying to you. The father of lies wants you to believe your feelings instead of trusting the truth of God's Word. This is why we can sing that hymn *Before the Throne of God Above* which says;

*Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.*

This is why we need to be regularly reflecting on God's righteousness.

Thirdly we are to daily resolving to walk in new obedience. Zechariah 3:6–7 says [6] *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.”* This is just another way of saying that now that your heart is free, then freely obey. Jesus says in John 14:15, [15] *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

The reason I use the language of daily resolving to walk in new obedience is because it's the language of our shorter catechism as it relates to repentance unto life. Question 87 of the Shorter Westminster Catechism says; What is repentance unto life? The answer is repentance unto life is a saving grace,(1) whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,(2) and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,(3) does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God,(4) with full purpose of, and endeavoring after, new obedience.(5) [(1) Acts. 11:18, (2) Acts. 2:37–38, (3) Joel 2:12; Jer. 3:22, (4) Jer. 31:18–19; Ezek. 36:31, (5) II Cor. 7:11; Isa. 1:16–17.]

When we repent, turn from our sins and place our faith in Jesus Christ alone we're saved. The fruit of our salvation among other things is a change in our affections, actions and what we now love and how we now live. Our obedience flows from this principle of the new life within us. We have a new nature, new priorities, new motives, a new purpose and a new found freedom but we don't use that freedom as a covering for evil or a license to sin. Rather we use it as a motivation for obedience. A child of God can never sin away Christ's righteousness, but we can sin away our usefulness for God. We can fall into grave sin and forfeit our peace and our witness. Understanding what God wants us to do is not very difficult but doing what God wants us to do often is. It requires new obedience to walk in His ways every day and no longer walk in our ways. We're always to be choosing God's will instead of our will.

One of my favorite lines in C.S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair* comes when the kids seem to face a life or death decision. To obey Aslan would seem to cause immediate death but to disobey Aslan would seem to preserve their lives. One of the characters looks at the other and says 'Aslan didn't tell us what would happen if we obey him. He only told us what to do.' Then Lewis writes 'they all stood looking at one another with bright eyes, it was a sickening moment.' When was the last time you had a sickening moment? How did you fare? This is the cost of obedience. New obedience is all about choosing God's will over our own and it can be a sickening moment to choose God's will over our own, but the only place where true happiness and joy can be found in our Christian walk is in obedience to Christ and our trust in Him.

There is a quote I like from Randy Alcorn's book titled Happiness. He says 'Sin sabotages happiness.' I'd like to add that sin not obedience kills happiness and joy. We are to walk in a new obedience. We also see in Zechariah 3:7 the great blessing and incredible promise for all who belong to Christ and walk in His ways for in heaven we'll reign and rule with Jesus having uninterrupted access to His holy presence forever. To live in the light of God's saving grace we need to always be remembering, never forgetting God's extraordinary rescue of us as we regularly reflect on our righteous robes and we need to be daily resolving to walk in new obedience.

The final principle for us to use against Satan's cruel and ruthless accusations is found in Zechariah 3:8–10 which says [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. [9] 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. [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.

We are to keep our eyes on the bruised Branch and not on the burning brand/stick. It's true that we need to be killing sin daily but our primary focus daily needs to be on Christ, not on sin or us. Why does the Prophet say to Joshua in verse 8 'Hear now'? It is because it is so hard for us to hear the grace of God in our hearts. It is found only in the Messiah Jesus Christ. Satan is always here to tempt us to take our eyes off Jesus, to doubt God's goodness, to question and complain about His providence and to despise His mercies. Therefore we need to hear now the message of the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Notice the four terms listed in these verses – servant, branch, stone, vine. These are all Old Testament designations for the Messiah. The Prophet Zechariah is calling us to never take our eyes off Him even though the Prophet Isaiah said He was One on the cross in whom men hid their face from Him (Isaiah 53:3). We are to fix our eyes and gaze on Jesus Christ, the One who was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities and upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

What is astonishing is that on the cross God the Father turned His face away from His only begotten Son in judgment over our sins. Jesus ultimately fulfills Joshua's priestly work for Joshua was just a type of Christ but Jesus is the great High Priest whose name is Love. Yet He was the High Priest for us at an unimaginable cost. Jesus became Joshua in his filthy garments. He was not only plucked from the fire but He put on our filthy sinfulness and perished in the fires of God's wrath and judgment so that we could be spared from that for all eternity. It's amazing to think the Accursed One dying for the accused ones for you and me. He did it in a single day.

Hebrews 10:12 says *[12] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.* Christ's work is finished. At the beginning of Zechariah 3 He was standing to defend us and now He is sitting because He has saved us. Therefore we need to be continually worshipping before the throne of God and singing again from that great hymn *Before the Throne of God Above* which says;

*When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.*

*Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.*

Christian, never forget who you were but more importantly continually remembering who you are. You were a child of wrath, a brand plucked from the fire. You are a child of God, holy to the Lord now go out and invite your neighbor to come under His vine and under His fig tree which is what we see in Zechariah 3:10. In other words, go proclaim Jesus Christ to your neighbors and invite them to Him. It is the only place where true life can be found.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to Him if you don't know Him personally. I ask you today to come to Him now and place your faith in Him. The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon illustrated the magnitude of God's love in the beautiful invitation of the Gospel to those who don't Christ in this way: Picture today you are going home from church and you have

an enemy who lives in your neighborhood who has been your enemy your whole life but you have compassion on him and there is never a day that goes by that you don't pray for him and try to win his friendship but he mocks your attempts, spits on your kindness and curses your name. As you are driving home this particular day driving into your neighborhood you see crowds gathered in the streets looking at blazing flames raging from a house that is on fire. Immediately you realize that is my enemy's house and in the street people are horrified shouting 'There is a man on the second floor who is about to burn to death and no one can save him!' He is your enemy, the very man that is about to die.

Full of lovingkindness you say 'I will save him if I can.' He sees you approach the house and puts his head out the window as he curses you saying 'everlasting damnation be upon you for I would rather perish in hell than to have you save me!' Nevertheless you dash through the smoke, climb the blazing staircase to save him and when you reach him he struggles to resist you and tries to pull you into the flames. Can you imagine your love being so powerful that you would be willing to perish in those flames rather than leave your enemy to be burned?

No way! There is no way I could do that but Jesus did it for us. We hated Him and when He came to save us we rejected Him but Jesus loved us that much. If you're reading this today and you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ you are the man on the second floor in the burning house, but Jesus perished in the fire of God's wrath so that we might be brands plucked from the fire from eternal punishment. Why? It was because of His love for us and His joy to save sinners. He delights in changing foes to friends and enemies into His beloved children.

If you don't know Christ don't let the father of lies keep you from this incredible truth any longer. Come to Jesus Christ just as you are and watch Him love you and change you more than you could ever imagine. Let's pray.

Prayer:

If you don't know Christ as your Savior today pray simply in your heart, 'Jesus I need You, save me from the fires of Your judgment, bring me into Your family, place Your Spirit within me, forgive me of my sins and make me the kind of person You want me to be.' Then Father for those who know You already, we pray that You would continue to strengthen us with Your Word and by Your Spirit. We ask that You would cause all of us to worship before Your throne for the rest of our lives, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Introduction

- I. Be aware of SATAN'S SCHEMES (1)
- II. Live in light of God's SAVING GRACE (2-7)
- III. Keep your focus on the BRUISED BRANCH (8-10)

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