1. INTRODUCTION:

- Christ does three important jobs at once, in the plan of redemption:
  - (1) He’s a prophet = he reveals and teaches God’s will
  - (2) He’s a king = he rules, governs and sustains all creation
  - (3) He’s a priest = he reconciles people to God
    - This passage is a prophesy about Christ as the good and perfect priest for God’s people
- The Book of Zechariah is apocalyptic literature; like Revelation
  - There’re all sorts of different genres in the Bible:
    - Law, poetry, wisdom, narrative, historical, gospels, prophesy, logical, apocalyptic
    - Many books use most (or all) of these forms in turn (e.g. Exodus has narrative, law, poetry and prophesy)
  - When you read the Bible, you mentally adjust your interpretive lens as you run across these different genres, whether you realize it or not
    - You instinctively know poetry is different than narrative, and prophesy is different than history, etc.
  - Apocalyptic literature has lots of visions, and lots of amazing and insane imagery – because it uses deliberately jarring visual images to get a point across
    - It’s a genre that writers used to communicate hope via a series of fantastical, out of this world, odd visions
    - Sometimes you should take it literally, sometimes not – the context will tell you
- In our passage, this morning, Zechariah gives us a vision of something that didn’t actually happen – and he did it to make a larger point:
  - God, through Zechariah, intends it to mean something to the exiles who have returned from exile,
  - and are trying to make a go of it in a devastated and destroyed land,
  - and who are probably pretty depressed and pessimistic at the task before them:
    - no temple, no sacrificial system, no renewing fellowship with God, no atonement, no city, no walls around the city, no conceptual national identity, oppression from Samaritan neighbors, the order to stop building the temple (Ezra 4:17-24),
the decree from Darius (about ten years later!) that they could
begin again (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:1-12), and the drive to “stay on task”

- Zechariah gives his people (and us!) a message of hope; but hope of what?

2. TEXT:

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 (Zech 3:1).

- What is Zechariah seeing?
  o He sees Joshua, the high priest at the time, standing before the angel
  of the Lord
- What’s Joshua doing?
  o Zechariah doesn’t say
    o The focus is on Joshua as the high priest, so I think he’s “standing
      before the angel of the Lord” in the sense that he’s doing his high
      priestly duties in the holy of holies, inside the temple (see Leviticus
      16)
    o Of course, there is no temple; it’s being re-built!
    o This is why the vision isn’t literal reality; this isn’t actually happening.
    o But, God is communicating with the Israelites, through Zechariah, by
      means of this strange vision
      o Its power is in the imagery it evokes in your mind; the same way a
        picture can be more powerful than four pages of explanatory text
- Who is the angel of the Lord?
  o It’s Jesus; who speaks of Himself in the third-person as Yahweh
    (below)
- Satan is there, sort of lurking in the corner as Joshua performs his duties,
  laughing and smirking, accusing him – but, accusing him of what?
  o You’ll see!
  o The point is that Zechariah sees Joshua doing his high priestly work,
    and Satan is laughing at him – he’s clearly at some kind of
disadvantage
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?” (Zech 3:2).

- In the vision, Christ pipes up and defends Joshua against Satan’s laughter and accusations
  - Zechariah refers to him as Yahweh; that’s why “LORD” is capitalized
  - Jesus speaks of Himself in the third-person, and refers to Himself by using the divine name
- **What does he say?** Three things:
  - **1** I rebuke you!
    - “Shut up!”
    - “You might laugh now, but I’m not laughing at Joshua or what he’s doing!”
  - **2** I’ve chosen Jerusalem and the Israelites, and I rebuke you!
    - “Nothing you accuse Joshua of, no crime of his you bring before me, no sin he commits will ever change the fact that I’ve chosen my people – and I rebuke you!”
  - **3** Joshua and the Israelite people are like a stick plucked from the fire, rescued from being burnt to a crisp
    - “I’ve rescued them, I’ve rescued him, and your accusations and laughter can’t change that”
    - Jesus can only say this because His grace is predicated on the fact that you and I can’t earn His love, His mercy, His grace or His kindness
    - This isn’t a NT concept; it’s a Bible concept!
- Why is Satan accusing Joshua? What has Joshua done?
  - Zechariah tells us:

  **Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments (Zech 3:3).**

- As Joshua does his duties, his clothes are filthy
- This doesn’t mean Joshua forgot to throw his priestly clothes into the washer on the “quick wash” cycle - it’s not physical dirt; it’s moral pollution!
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- The word here actually refers to excrement, but no translator really wants to bring that out
- In the same way, the well-known phrase from Isaiah (“but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags ...” Isa 64:6) refers to a woman’s menstrual rags
  - In a metaphorical way, Zechariah is telling us the high priest is morally polluted, in a very disgusting and very gross way – but, why!?
    - Israelite high priests had to go through a very strict, very regulated series of steps to ceremonially purify themselves, and atone for their own sins before going into the holy of holies to deal with the sins of the entire community – so, what’s the deal? Did Joshua skip these steps? Is that why he’s morally polluted?
    - The deal is that Joshua is inherently unclean and polluted, and unacceptable before God, just like all of us are – and there’s nothing he can do about it!
      - (1) You can’t fix yourself, or doll yourself up to be acceptable to God
      - (2) When God looks at you, he sees somebody who is inherently polluted, covered in filth, whose righteousness is as appealing as dirty menstrual rags

- So, why is Satan laughing? Why is he there, lurking in the corner, accusing Joshua?
  - Because, no matter what Joshua (or any human being does), the problem doesn’t go away = we’re sinful, we’ll mess up, we’ll fail, we’ll give in to temptation, we’ll fail to obey God, we’ll choose ourselves over His word – even if we know better
  - The Old Covenant laws about ceremonial and moral impurity and uncleanness, and the sacrificial system which accompanied it, are all object lessons which teach God’s people to recognize and “see” Jesus when he comes on the scene
  - Until Jesus comes, they’re stuck with a temporary system; a band-aid (or a roll of duct tape) that doesn’t fix the underlying problem

- That’s why Satan is laughing:
  - (1) The Israelites have the go-ahead to start work on the temple again, but they’re not doing anything – that’s what Haggai and Zechariah’s ministries are about!
  - (2) They’re lazy, self-centered, self-interested; they’re normal people like you and me!
- I can picture Satan laughing, and saying:
  o “Are we really going to try this again!?”
  o “Look at this guy, this high priest!”
  o “He’s a loser! He’s a sinner!”
  o “Do you really think anything will change, this time around?”
  o “Sure, go ahead – let’s see how it turns out, this time!”

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 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 3:4-5).

- Christ snaps at Satan, then something very important happens – focus on the metaphorical imagery and you’ll “get it” easily enough!
- **What happens?**
  o Jesus removes the high priest’s filthy clothing, and gives him new, clean clothing – pure clothing.
  o Zechariah is so carried away, he steps into his own vision (sort of like a movie character turning to the camera, and speaking directly to the audience) and suggests Joshua get a clean, new turban, too!
- **What does this “new clothing” for the high priest mean?**
  o It symbolizes that his sin has been removed, and Christ has made him holy and pure
    - (1) In the same way, the Book of Revelation pictures all of Christ’s adopted children, from every nation on earth, clothed in white robes (Rev 7:9)
    - (2) It’s why the angel the ladies encountered at Jesus’ tomb on the morning of His resurrection were clothed in white (Mk 16:5) = purity and holiness
    - (3) It’s why, when Peter, James and John saw a brief preview of Jesus as *He really is* on the mountain (Mk 9:1-9), His clothes glowed with an ethereal, white light = purity and holiness
Joshua and those people from the Book of Revelation don’t have any righteousness of their own – Christ gives it to them.

You don’t have any righteousness of your own:

1. Christ has to give it to you
2. And, He gives it to you when He changes your heart, soul and mind, so you repent and believe His Good News!

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 (Zech 3:6-7).

- How is this even possible?
  - How can Joshua, a sinful man, walk in God’s ways and keep his charge?
  - He’s going to slip up eventually; that’s the problem!
  - It’s like giving a teenager a new car, and saying, “It’s yours as long as you never mess up!”

- Jesus clarifies what he means, and tells him what Yahweh (“the Lord of hosts”) has to say:

  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 (Zech 3:8).

- Joshua and the other priests are a sign and object lesson for something
  - This vision isn’t real
  - It’s stands for something; it teaches something very specific and very important – but what!?

- What’s the message?
  - What does this vision stand for?
  - What does it mean that the high priest will be holy and pure?
  - How can a sinful person actually be holy and pure?
  - How can Joshua perfectly obey God, and therefore earn the right to minister in God’s real and true throne room, in heaven above?
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- Well, God tells us – **He’ll bring His servant, Jesus to do it all:**
  - Jesus is referred to as a “branch” many times in prophetic literature
    - [1] He’s the branch descended from Jesse, King David’s father (Isa 11:1).
    - [2] He’s compared to “a young plant ...a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him,” (Isa 53:2).
    - [3] He’s the righteous Branch, descended from David, who God will raise up as King to rule over His people in righteousness and holiness (Jer 23:5-6).
  - Joshua, the poor high priest who’s standing dejected and humiliated before the alter in his filthy clothes, isn’t like this at all:
    - [1] He isn’t sinless and pure; Christ has to give him his own righteousness
    - [2] He can’t perfectly obey God’s word; he’ll mess up
    - [3] He’s not inherently fit to atone for the people’s sins; he’s morally polluted himself!
  - This is all a sign; an object lesson:
    - [1] Christ is sinless and pure
    - [2] Christ has perfectly obeyed God’s word
    - [3] Christ is fit to atone for the sins of everyone who comes to Him in repentance and faith
    - [4] And, Joshua and Jesus have the same name; not a coincidence!
  - God **knows** Joshua can’t do it, so He’ll bring His servant, the Branch, to take care of it for him and for us!
    - This is why Christ rebuked Satan; “This is what the Lord’s gonna do; how do you like them apples?”
- Jesus continues speaking:

*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 (Zech 3:9).*

- **What is this stone? Where did it come from?**
  - Zechariah doesn’t say!
Clearly, it symbolizes something

- (1) Some folks think the stone in the breastplate of the new and better high priest – Jesus
  - Maybe
- (2) Others think it’s Christ as the stumbling-stone, the rock of offense that people will trip over because of His message
  - This is always a negative reference (i.e. “you should have accepted Him, but you didn’t!”), and Zechariah isn’t going for negativity, here
- (3) Some people think it’s Christ as the foundation stone, the cornerstone of the temple that Zechariah and Haggai are encouraging the people to build
  - Agreed!
- What’s the inscription? What does it say?
  - Zechariah doesn’t tell us!
  - I think it’s the Gospel; “the kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent and believe the Good News!” (Mk 1:15).

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 (Zech 3:9-10).

- What will God do one day?
  - He’ll remove unrighteousness and iniquity from the land of Israel, and from the world
  - He’ll cleanse people from their sins

3. CONCLUSION – Why does this matter to you?

- Three reasons:
  - (1) If you’re not a Christian, then you’re just like Joshua:
    - You’re morally polluted, you’re morally unclean, and the same disgust that you reflexively feel when you hear metaphors about filthy garments and dirty menstrual rags are what God feels about your alleged “goodness,” which is no “goodness” at all
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- But, Christ is extending grace, offering to clothe you in His own righteousness as a gift, if you’ll admit your crimes against His law, and place Him on the throne in your life by believing who He is and what He did
  - 2 Jesus is the perfect Savior
    - Joshua wasn’t perfect
      - but Jesus is perfect!
    - Joshua wasn’t fit to atone for your sins, because he had his own to deal with
      - but Jesus is fit!
    - Joshua couldn’t cleanse you and this world from sin and unrighteousness; he’s just the guy God appointed to keep re-applying a new strip of duct-tape once a year!
      - But Jesus can cleanse you from all your unrighteousness, and then He’ll give you His, as a gift!
  - 3 Satan has no claim on you
    - Satan laughed at and accused Joshua, but he can’t do that to Jesus and, if you belong to Jesus, then he can’t do that to you, either!

- “Jesus, My Great High Priest” by Isaac Watts (ca. 1709):

  Jesus, my great High Priest,
  Offered his blood and died;
  My guilty conscience seeks
  No sacrifice beside.
  His pow'rful blood did once atone,
  And now it pleads before the throne.
  To Christ, my substitute,
  Will I commit my cause;
  He answers and fulfills
  His Father's broken laws.
  Behold my soul at freedom set --
  My Jesus paid the dreadful debt!
  My advocate appears

---

1 Trinity Hymnal (red), #306.
For my defense on high;  
A gracious Father hears  
And lays his thunder by.  
Not all that hell or sin can say  
Shall turn his heart, his love, away.  
Should all the hosts of death  
And pow'rs of hell unknown  
Put their most dreadful forms  
Of rage and mischief on,  
I shall be safe, for Christ displays  
Superior pow'r and guardian grace.