



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Zechariah 3:1–10

December 17, 2017
English Standard Version

“Hope for the Dirty”

The 3rd Sermon in an Advent series
“Christmas with the Minor Prophets”

Zechariah 3:1-10

“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. 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. 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.”

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. We need to be reminded of what Advent prepares us for! We need to look forward to the coming of the King. We need to not be so down

on ourselves, so unaccepting of ourselves, that it erodes our **hope**. We need to trust that You are enough and that Your acceptance of us, and more importantly, Your **cleansing** of us, is enough. Enable us this day, to set our **hope** on Christ and to eagerly look forward to His coming. And so we pray, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The Weird 'Trial' of Franz Kafka* ¹

Two of the big issues in the world of therapy and counseling today are helping people deal with their **guilt** and **shame**. We've removed most of the ways people deal with those things by **downplaying** or **disregarding** them. Many of the academic and intellectual elite will condescendingly say that **guilt** and **shame** are just remnants of our unenlightened past. "Ah, yes. **Guilty** conscience. **Shame**-ridden. **Guilt**-ridden. That's for then. This is now. We're different. We're better. We're enlightened. We're different because we live in a day in which **who's to say what's right and wrong? Nobody knows for certain what's right and wrong. Nobody knows for certain about God. We all have to decide these things for ourselves.** Everybody has to come up with their own standards and not be held to some other standards. We don't see the individual as **unclean** and **defiled** and **evil**. We think people are basically good. We don't have this sense of **uncleanness** that people used to have." And I think all of that **is very wrong**. But even more, I think that's **a superficial response** to what are actually serious issues.

One person who has shown that's a superficial analysis is one of the great writers of the twentieth century. He's brilliant ... and very weird. **Franz Kafka**, in his book, *The Trial*, explains this. *The Trial*, by the way, is a fine book, and it's been made into a movie twice. There's also strong allusions to it in both *Blade Runner* movies. Even though *The Trial* movies have great actors, they're both **really boring**. I'll tell you why. Here's how the book goes.

In the book, Josef K. is having a normal life. In the very beginning of the book, he's arrested. He's taken into custody. Nobody tells him what he did wrong. "What am I being arrested for? What have I been accused of?" Nobody tells him. He goes from being held in custody to detainment to a hearing and on and on and on. Nobody ever explains why. Everyone is **very mean**. Everyone is **very hard**. Everyone is **very cruel**, unsympathetic, overbearing, and bureaucratic, saying, "You'll have to talk to my supervisor. I have my orders."

He goes from episode to episode, hearing to hearing, custody to custody. Nobody ever tells him what's wrong. He starts to wonder about his life. He says, "Maybe it was for this. Maybe I've been arrested for that? I did that. That doesn't seem like it would have been bad enough, but maybe this happened." He's goes through the whole book **never knowing** what he was accused of. In the very end, like on the very last page, one of the people who has him in custody, one of his guards, **stabs him to death, and he dies**. That's how the book ends. Wouldn't that be a great movie? He's arrested. He never finds out what he was arrested for. And in the end, they kill him, **and we never find out what he was arrested for**.

It's actually a powerful book, and here's why. **Franz Kafka** told us what the book was about. He died in 1924, and most of his works were published after his death, against his wishes (he wanted them all burned). Along with his books, he kept journals which explained all his

¹ The Introduction is adapted from "Becoming Clean" by Dr. Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 5/28/06. information about Franz Kafka comes from Wikipedia.

writing. And in these journals, **Kafka** wrote about this book, *The Trial*, and he says the book is about the state in which we find ourselves today, which is **quite sinful**, yet **quite independent of guilt**. **Kafka**, who was a **German Jew**, wrote this book in **1914 and 1915**, right at the beginning of **World War I**, and he says that we live in a world where **we don't believe in sin**. **We don't believe in guilt**. We don't have these categories of **guilt** and **sin** and **shame** anymore, and yet **we still know, we still feel, that there's something wrong with us**.

Franz Kafka is on to something. He says in spite of the fact we don't have these categories of **guilt** and **sin** and **shame** anymore, **we still have this deep, profound sense** that if we were examined, **we wouldn't pass**. If we were inspected, we'd be **rejected**. We have a profound sense that **we have to hide**. We have a deep sense that **we aren't acceptable**. In some way, we're going to have to prove to ourselves and to others that **we're worthy** or that **we're okay** or that **we're lovable** or that **we're valuable**. **Kafka** is saying it's because **you don't believe in sin**. **You don't believe in guilt**, even when you feel **guilty**. **You don't believe in anything**, and yet you know ... somehow ... that you're **unclean**. But now, **there's nothing you can do about it**. And it leaves you **without hope**.

Somehow, despite rejecting the categories of **guilt** and **sin** and **shame**, **you still know** that you're not up to specs. You're not up to speed. **You can call it** some sort of phobia or complex or syndrome. **You can say**, "My parents didn't love me enough." **You can give it** some psychological term, but there it is. We all have a sense that **we're unclean**. **We're covering**. **We're hiding**. **We're working like crazy to do something about it**. We all have a sense, even us, even now, that **we're unclean**. And when we can't figure out how to address our sense of being **unclean**, of being **inadequate**, of being **unacceptable**, of being **dirty** ... then **we have no hope**. And most people can't live **without hope**.

Welcome to the world of the Prophet Zechariah. Before we get too far into the text, we have to back up and ask some important questions ...

BACKGROUND: *Who is Zechariah and What are these visions?* ²

Zechariah is a prophet of God, a contemporary of Haggai, and he was writing around the 6th Century, B.C. Two weeks ago, we were in Amos, which occurs about 150 years before Zechariah, and last week we were in Malachi, which occurs about 150 years after Zechariah. So, what's going on in Zechariah's time? It's been about 15 years **since** we were last in Zechariah so let me remind you that God's people have been in exile in Babylon and have now begun to return to their home, the city of Jerusalem. We can't forget that the prophets wrote to real people in real life situations. In Zechariah's case, the exiles that had returned to rebuild the temple felt **overwhelmed**. Haggai rebuked them for taking care of their own homes but neglecting the temple. Then he encouraged them as they grew weary with the challenge before them. They felt the strain of local opposition and so he assured them of the Lord's help. Along with the actual rebuilding was also the need to reestablish worship. That was no simple task **since** the generation of those rebuilding the temple had never observed temple worship firsthand, with a few exceptions. And the temple is really rubble and it needs to be rebuilt. Things are particularly challenging for God's people and now the prophet Zechariah has been sent to them

² The Background is adapted from "The Book of Zechariah" *The Reformation Study Bible*; and the sermon "Plucked from the Fire" by Dr. Phil Newton, Southwood Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 1/26/03, www.southwoodsbc.org.

in this difficult time in their history to encourage them and to prepare them for restored fellowship with God.

It's an enormously difficult book to read, because the first half of the book is presented through a series of **night visions**, so it reads a lot like the Book of Revelation, Ezekiel, and Daniel, but not a lot like the other Minor Prophets, which is mostly historical narrative, where those prophets were telling the people what God wanted them to know. That's not the case here. In Zechariah, God is giving Zechariah visions about the present and the future, but they're mixed together. In order to understand Zechariah, we have to recognize that we have pictures of the future in snapshot fashion. But he doesn't place the snapshots in any particular order or chronological sequence. When we read a passage, we only see what's happening **in that snapshot**, not how it relates to all the other snapshots.

Zechariah's focus reflects the Lord's continuing care and concern for His people. In a day of small things, when the nations around them were at rest while God's people struggled with overwhelming challenges, it was easy to conclude that the Lord was distant and unaware of what was going on. On the contrary, the night visions make the point that God sees everything that's happening, cares for His people, and is ready to act for their blessing. Yet the Lord's favor doesn't isolate His people from the reality of suffering. In fact, the visions depict great difficulties ahead for God's people, while assuring them of His final victory and their final vindication. The man called upon to lead the exiles to restore worship of the Lord was Joshua the high priest. And so, with that background, we're going to enter into one of those visions, the third and central vision, of Joshua the High Priest standing before the Lord in the Temple. And the first thing we see is ...

v. 1-3: THE DEFENSE HE MOUNTS ³

"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."

Well the passage before us opens with a dramatic scene. Joshua the high priest appears before **The Angel of The Lord**, an Old Testament figure who, in the light of the New Testament, can only be understood as **the pre-incarnate Christ**. Worship at the altar had been re-instituted as the people had come back to the city even though the temple had not yet been fully restored. So Joshua is here as the high priest and he appears before the Lord Himself. But what may have begun as an act of worship quickly becomes a tribunal, doesn't it? At the right hand of **The Angel of The Lord**, notice, Satan, the chief accuser, the opponent of God and of His people. And he's there to accuse Joshua before the heavenly courts to press for Joshua's destruction.

3 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the Sermons, "Hope for the Dirty" by Dr. Sean Michael Lucas, preached when Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, MS, 12/13/15, www.fpcpca.net; **"A Brand Plucked from the Fire"** by Dr. David Strain, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 3/16/14, www.fpcjackson.org; **"Accuser and the Advocate"** 6/3/90, **"The Face of God"** 11/1/92, **"Becoming Clean"** 5/28/06, and **"The God Who Reconciles Sinners"** 4/17/11, all by Dr. Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, *The Tim Keller Sermon Archive*, Logos Bible Software 7.11; **And the book, The Gospel according to Zechariah: Longing for God in an Age of Discouragement** by Dr. Bryan Gregory, pages 73–82.

The court is assembled. Joshua, the defendant, is arraigned before the Heavenly Judge. The satanic prosecutor stands to accuse. And notice carefully that Satan doesn't have to invent any of the charges he brings against Joshua, **verse 3**, "*Now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments.*" Now that would have been a shocking image, particularly for Zechariah, who was himself a priest. The high priest had to wear sacred, pristine, white linen vestments before he could appear in the presence of God in the temple. But here he is, **covered in filth**. The word can actually mean "excrement." He is **unclean** ... literally, ritually, and in **every sense of the word**. He appears before God utterly **unacceptable, contemptible, defiled**.

It's a powerful representation of Joshua **the sinner**. And all Satan needs to do is to point. The evidence is irrefutable and undeniable. Joshua was **so dirty** he was stomach-turning and repulsive. No trumped-up charges necessary; the facts are condemning enough. The Devil needed false accusations for Jesus, but he needs none for Joshua and he needs none for you and none for me. Like Joshua, apart from Christ, we are **unacceptable, defiled, degraded in the filth** of our own **sin**. And all the Devil ever has to do is simply point to the facts. It's an open and shut case. The defense can't counter the facts of our **sin**.

And yet, something extraordinary happens. Look at **verse 2**, "*The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?*" One imagines Satan as the court assembles before the judgment seat. With a look of triumph, he denounces Joshua, recounting **all his sins**. And now we see him, waiting for the sentence to fall, a self-assured smile playing across his diabolical face. And the sentence **does fall**, the condemnation **does come**, but it **does not fall on Joshua**. The ***anathema*** of ***The Angel of The Lord***, the curse of divine wrath – this is stunning – falls not on the accused ... **but on the accuser**. "*The Lord rebuke you, O Satan!*" Understand these aren't empty words. **Psalm 106:9**, "*He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up.*" **Mark 4:39**, "*Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' and the wind ceased and there was a great calm.*" **The rebukes of Jesus, The Angel of The Lord, bring the judgments they call for**. The self-assured smirk on Satan's face slides away as ***The Angel of The Lord*** defends His people.

And notice what the angel calls God here. He is "***the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem.***" Joshua is the representative of the people of Jerusalem. The condemnation Satan wants for Joshua is the condemnation he wants to fall on them all. **But the Lord has chosen them**. They are **His elect**, precious to Him, **and all those whom He has chosen He defends**. Jesus prayed concerning His disciples, **John 17:9**, "*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me.*" Having been given a people in the electing love of God, He intercedes on their behalf. He defends them against every charge. **All the elect, all His beloved people, have in Christ a perfect defender**.

In fact, Joshua far from being consigned to the fires of judgment ... is instead "***a brand plucked from the fire.***" A brand plucked from the fire – that's what you are if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ – ***a brand plucked from the fire***, rescued from the inferno of God's wrath. Spared judgment by God's infinite mercy and grace you're ***a brand plucked from the fire***.

Now, no doubt the smile that once played on Satan's face is replaced by a look of confusion. Everyone in the heavenly courtroom knows Joshua is **guilty**. He's **guilty**. Satan knows it, Zechariah knows it, even Joshua knows it; the Lord Himself knows it. **And yet he is**

not condemned; he is defended. If you're trusting in Jesus Christ, the same can be said for you. We all **sin** ... I **sin** ... you **sin** ... we all **sin**. Our **sin** is undeniable, condemning, and filthy. Satan knows it, we know it, the Lord knows it, and still, in His great love for you, **Jesus defends you**. That's stunning. He defends you. We are indefensible, yet He defends us.

But it's so much more than that, because not only is there a defense that He mounts, but there is ...

v. 4-5: **THE CLEANSING HE PROVIDES**

"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."

The Angel of The Lord tells His attendants to remove the filthy garments from Joshua the High Priest and then says, **"Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you and I will clothe you with pure vestments."** As the angelic attendants obey, poor Zechariah is so overcome that he forgets himself and he bursts out, into the middle of this scene playing before him, **"Don't forget the turban!"** From Exodus we know the high priest's turban has an inscription in the front that reads, **"Holy to the Lord."** Holy to the Lord. Don't forget the turban that crowns him with this great declaration. Instead of filth, Joshua is now, by the grace of God, holy to the Lord. Zechariah sees Joshua now, arrayed in pure vestments, his iniquity taken away by the cleansing work of Jesus Christ, The Angel of The Lord.

Do you understand what's happened? Satan, remember, is right about Joshua's **unworthiness**. He's right about my **unworthiness** and he's right about your **unworthiness**. But not only does Jesus defend us, He makes us **clean** in the sight of God. He robes us with righteousness and He takes our filthy garments away. Joshua can take up the words of **Isaiah 61:10**, and so can we if the Lord has acted to defend us and to **cleanse** us by His grace. We can say, *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with jewels."* The garment of salvation, the robe of righteousness, the beautiful headdress of the priest who has access to the throne of God – all of that has been given to us if we trust in Christ.

The message of **Zechariah 3** is that if you're one of the chosen, a brand whom Christ has plucked from the fire, if you trust in Christ, you are counted righteous in the sight of God. Certainly, Satan will remind you of your **sin**, but the Gospel of God's Grace reminds us of **the righteousness of Christ** imputed to us and received **by faith alone**. You are now covered in **clean** vestments.

And we need to learn to be like Joshua here in the face of the Devil's schemes. Notice, Joshua never opens his mouth. The angel defends him. The angel **cleanses** him. Joshua makes no defense of his own. He trusts no work of his own to remedy the **guilt** and **shame** of his **sin**. He rests instead entirely on the work of Christ. We need enter no defense on our own when Satan comes to accuse us. We only need to remember that Jesus has acted for us and we are robed in His righteousness. **You are clean**, believer in Christ, you are clean. That's the **Gospel** here in the Minor Prophets. That's **Christmas Hope** in Zechariah. The defense He mounts, the **cleansing** He provides, and then third ...

v. 6-7: THE CHALLENGE HE ISSUES

“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.”

Having had his **sin** forgiven, Joshua is now being called to a life of personal holiness and obedience. He is to **“walk in My ways and keep My charge.”** Those two facets of the Christian life, forgiveness and obedience, cannot, and must not, ever be divorced. Those whom God justifies, He sanctifies. Those to whom He gives the robes of Christ’s righteousness must bear Christ’s likeness. There can be no holiness without **forgiveness**. The forgiven always grow in holiness. The great Scottish Pastor, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, the author of the famous Bible reading plan, once put it this way. He said, “It is not great talents God blesses so much as **great likeness** to Jesus. **A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.**” It’s not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. God uses obedient servants.

The second great privilege is Gospel access, **“I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.”** *The Angel of The Lord* is speaking about the court of heaven. That’s a staggering promise ... **the right of access, around My throne, in My presence, communing with Me.** There’s a connection, between growing obedience and deepening communion with God. Obedience and communion with God, by His Spirit, through His Word, ordinarily go together. If you want to feel the presence of God in your life, if you want to enjoy communion with Jesus through the means of grace – the Word preached, and His promises prayed, and the Gospel made visible in the sacraments – if you want a growing awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life ... simply obey. Work at obedience. Pursue holiness. Get serious about the Christian life. The defense He mounts, the **cleansing** He provides, the challenge He issues, and then fourth ...

v. 8-10: THE DELIVERANCE HE BRINGS

There remains an unanswered question in our text. Joshua is **guilty** as charged. God is holy, we’re not, and yet Satan is condemned. Joshua is **forgiven** and commissioned for service. Now how does that work? How is it right for God to do anything other than condemn Joshua? Look at **verses 8-10**, *“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 learn that Joshua and his friends are signs who point to another High Priest yet to come. Notice the text uses three titles for the one who is to come. He is the **servant of the Lord**, He is the **Branch**, and He is the **stone**. **The servant of the Lord** references passages like **Isaiah 53** where the servant makes atonement for our **sin** by His wounds and His afflictions. **The Branch** is a metaphor for the future Davidic King, **Jeremiah 23:5**, *“Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a **righteous Branch** and He shall reign as King and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”*

And the image of the **stone** set before Joshua, in this context probably refers to one particularly significant building block in the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple then underway. Was it the capstone, the cornerstone, a foundation stone? However, this stone has

seven eyes, and in the Book of Revelation, that image is symbolic of the perfect gaze of God's Spirit resting on the Messiah.

But more than the Messiah's identity, notice what the Messiah will do, **verse 9**, "*I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.*" **In a single day** – that's the one who is **The Angel of The Lord** who will be the suffering servant, the branch from David's line, the stone that is rejected of men and yet precious. He will atone for **sin**. That's a promise of the cross. Jesus suffered divine condemnation for us ... instead of us. Another Joshua has come; a greater Joshua, our true High Priest, Jesus who knew no **sin** who was made **sin** for us, so that, in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.

The filthy garments taken from Joshua were given to another. Jesus put them on when Joshua took them off. Jesus takes our filthy garments, wears them in our place, and becomes the object of the destruction for which Satan rightly pleads before the heavenly courts. The wrath of God is poured out upon our **sin**, but it does not fall on us; it falls on our substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. **He has died that Joshua might live. He has died that you ... might live.**

We face the same issues. We've all done **shameful** things, and we struggle to understand why. We all have things in our past that haunt us with **guilt** we can't seem to get rid of. Perhaps that deep sense of regret leaves us feeling as though we are left forever **dirty**. So we ask ourselves in the privacy of our own hearts, is my past too **corrupt** to move ahead? Can I really **be clean again**? Is there still **hope** ... for me? Well, to you I would say ...

CONCLUSION: *The Answer To Guilt Is Always Forgiveness* ⁴

A noted theologian and pastor once said that "there is an important difference between **guilt** and **guilt feelings**. The distinction is between that which is objective and that which is subjective. **Guilt** is objective; it is determined by a real analysis of what a person has done with respect to law. When a person transgresses a law, that person incurs **guilt**. This is true in the ultimate sense with regard to the law of God. Whenever we break the law of God, we incur objective guilt. We may deny that the **guilt** is there. We may seek to excuse it or deal with it in other ways. Still, the reality is that we have the **guilt**.

However, **guilty feelings** may or may not correspond proportionately to one's objective guilt. In fact, in most cases, they **do not** correspond proportionately. As painful as **guilty feelings** can be — and we've all experienced **guilty feelings** — I don't think any of us have ever experienced **feelings** of **guilt** in direct proportion to **the actual guilt** that we bear before God. I believe it is one of the mercies of God that He protects us from having to **feel the full weight of the guilt** that we actually have incurred in His sight.

Just as there are objective and subjective aspects of **guilt**, so there are objective and subjective aspects of **forgiveness**. First of all, **forgiveness** itself is objective. **The only cure for real guilt is real forgiveness based on real repentance and real faith.** However, we may have real and true **forgiveness** before God and yet not feel forgiven.

When this theologian was in the pastorate a woman came to him, and told me that she was **guilty** of a particular **sin** and she was plagued by **a guilty conscience**. I'll let him tell the story, "So I had her read **1 John 1:9**, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" She read it, then said: "Well, I have confessed this **sin** and I have asked God to forgive me of this **sin a hundred times**, but I still **feel**

⁴ The Conclusion is adapted from What Can I Do with My Guilt? by Dr. R. C. Sproul, pages 37–54.

guilty. What can I do?" I said: "Well, let me ask you to do something else. I think you need to get on your knees and ask God to forgive you again."

When she heard that, she became **very frustrated**. She said: "You're supposed to be a theologian. I expected something a little more **profound** than this kind of advice from you. I've already told you that I have confessed this **sin** to God and asked Him to forgive me a hundred times." I told her: "I'm not asking you to confess **that sin** to God. I want you to confess a different **sin**." She asked, "What's that?" I replied, "I want you to confess **your sin of arrogance**." **That really irritated her**. She said: "Arrogance? What do you mean? I've been the most humble person in the world. I've been beating my breast and I've been on my face begging God to forgive me." So I said, "Does God say that if you confess He will forgive?" She answered, "Yes." "So how many times do you have to confess your **sin** to God? If you confess it once and truly repent of it, what does God say He will do?" She said, "He'll forgive it."

With that, I said to her: "But that wasn't good enough for you. You went to God a second time and said: 'Run that by me again. I don't really **trust** Your sincerity. I don't really **believe**, God, that You mean what You say when You promise that You will forgive me.' Or maybe what you're thinking is that the free remission of **sins** that God offers to humbly penitent people may be good enough for gross **sinners but not for you**. You're thinking: 'It can't be this easy. Let other people bask in mercy and grace. I have more dignity than that. I want to **do something** to make up for it.' But you can't make up for it. You're a debtor who can't pay your debts. All you can do is cry unto God, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a **sinner**,' and take God at His word. You have to live not by your **feelings** but by **His truth**. **Your feelings** are subjective. **His Word** is objective. It is true. If God says, 'I forgive you,' you are **forgiven** no matter how you **feel**, and to refuse that **forgiveness** is an act of arrogance."

In the end, it was the power of **forgiveness** that I shared with the young woman. I said: "You've told me what you've done. God's answer is not to paint a big red 'A' on your chest and make you walk through the community in **shame** and **embarrassment**, like the woman whom the Pharisees caught in adultery. **The answer to guilt is always forgiveness**. The only thing I know of that can cure **real guilt** is real forgiveness." I went on to say: "You've confessed your **sin** to me, and that's fine. I can tell you, 'God bless you.' But what you need to do is get by yourself, get down on your knees, and tell God what you have done. Tell Him that you're sorry and ask Him to forgive you **and to make you clean**."

As you may have guessed by now, or if you read the footnote, that Theologian and Pastor was Dr. R.C. Sproul, who passed away Thursday afternoon. As I posted when I heard the news, "Thousands came to know the Scriptures through his ministry. Thousands more came to know Reformed Theology through his ministry. And Thousands came to know the Savior through his ministry. He preached his last sermon on November 26th of this year. It was on **Hebrews 2:1-4** and was entitled, "**So Great Salvation**."

Joshua the High Priest would have understood ... as he stood **before** the throne of grace now clothed in clean garments. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, would have understood ... as He is the one who **left** the throne of grace to give us His **clean** garments and take our dirty ones upon Himself. I pray that everyone here understands ... as that same Jesus, **now our forever High Priest dressed in our dirty garments**, takes you and me, and puts on us His clean garments, so that we can boldly approach that very same throne of grace. We are given His robes of

righteousness. In putting them on us, we are **completely forgiven**, because **the answer to guilt ... is always forgiveness**.

Now what does that mean for us as the Devil comes, as he will, tonight perhaps, tomorrow maybe, the day after, the day after that ... who knows when he comes? What does that mean for us as we face down his accusations day after day after day? Doesn't it mean that we can **sing** with confidence,

*“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 was satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me.”*

You **sing** that in Satan's face and **silence** his accusations ... “Jesus died **for my sins, I am clean!**” Think about that ... And then thank Him for that ... You need to pray. Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see all our **sin**, all our **guilt**, all our **shame**, our **unacceptability**, our **uncleanness**, our **dirt** and our **filth** ... and then upward we look and see our Savior there. God our Father, we bow before You and we confess to You that we often live as a people without **hope**. We deserve destruction. You defend us. Christ intercedes for us and **cleanses** us and robes us with His righteousness and takes our filthy garments and wears them Himself. He puts them on and is condemned instead of us. How we praise You for the Gospel of God's Grace! And as Satan comes against us, as he no doubt will, reminding us of the filth of our **guilt** and **shame** and **sin**, oh would You help us to cling to that glorious truth – the tomb is empty, the work is done, and my Savior who bears the wounds of His finished works sits at the right hand of the throne of God above and the Devil must take up his argument with Him. His wounds silence every accusation; the debt is paid. So be with us, we pray. Restore our **hope**. Thank You that He comes to take away our **sin**, putting it on Himself, wearing our dirty garments. Thank You that we have a great High Priest who makes us **clean!** Thank You that the King is coming! Grant that we may believe it ... and live like it ... and **hope** in it ... in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

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Hebrews 9:24-28

*“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the High Priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ... But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away **sin** by the*

*sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the **sins** of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with **sin** but **to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.**”*