

ZECHARIAH'S VISION OF JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST

NO. 611

A SERMON
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BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD,
and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.
And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan;
even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee:
is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?
Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.
And he answered and spake to those that stood before him, saying,
Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said,
Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.
And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head.
So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments.
And the angel of the LORD stood by.”*
Zechariah 3:1-5

THE original intention of this vision was to foretell the revival of the Jewish state after its long depression through the Babylonish captivity. Joshua, the high priest, with his tattered garments, must be looked upon as the type of the Jewish people in their deep distress. He was ministering before the Lord in worn and filthy garments, to show at once the sin of Israel and the poverty into which they had fallen. For so poor were they that the service of God could not be conducted in suitable apparel, but the high priest himself appeared before the altar in robes unfitted for his sacred work.

The set time to favor Zion is according to the visions most near at hand, and Satan, the old adversary of the chosen race, bestirs himself to resist them, and turn away the favor of God from them. But that same angel of the covenant who led the people through the wilderness, and carried them all the days of old, stands before the throne as their advocate, and at His request, JEHOVAH rebukes Satan, and begins to bless the people.

Joshua, their representative, receives a change of raiment, in testimony that the people's sin is forgiven, and that God accepts their worship. The vision then sweeps on to the day of the Lord Jesus, and the heart of the prophet Zechariah is cheered by a sight of the whole land restored to its former peace and happiness, under the reign of the glorious one who is called, “My servant, THE BRANCH.”

While we have been interpreting the other visions of Zechariah, we have tried to derive present comfort and profit from them. We will endeavor to do so on this occasion. We may very properly take Joshua as a type of all the people of God, as they stand in their sense of sin and natural faultiness, subject to the accusations of Satan, but delivered by their ever gracious Lord. And the change of raiment as setting forth the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of the Savior's righteousness, which is the joy of all believers.

Let us take each particular separately, and may God the Holy Spirit shed a sacred light upon the vision, and may we see in it more than Zechariah himself discovered. May we see JEHOVAH-Jesus in all the glory of His love, manifesting Himself to His chosen as He does not unto the world.

I. To begin, then, where the vision begins, with THE BELIEVER HIMSELF REPRESENTED BY JOSHUA.

The believer himself is described as a priest standing before the angel of the Lord. Let us mark this. *He is a priest.* Who are the priests? Certain sons of Korah, who take too much upon them, say, “We are

the priests, we are the legitimate descendants of the apostles, and a mysterious power distills from our priestly hands.”

We reply to them, it is impossible that you should be descendants of the apostles and yet claim to possess priestly power, for the apostles never claimed any peculiar priesthood for themselves above other believers, but they spoke of their brethren, the Christians of their age, as being on a par with themselves in the matter of priesthood. “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5).

If then these pretenders to priesthood are priests in any special sense, they certainly are not descendants of the apostles, for the apostles claimed no priority of priesthood beyond the rest of their brethren, but said of all the saints, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.”

The fact is they are neither one nor the other—they are not descendants of the apostles, for they preach not the apostles’ Gospel, and know not their spirit, nor have they any priestly office, unless it be that the old Babylonian harlot accepts them as her foster children, and gives them a name and a place among those who partake in her abominations.

Who are the priests? Why, every humble man and woman that knows the power of Jesus Christ in his own soul, to purge and cleanse him from dead works, is appointed to serve as a priest unto God. I say every humble man and every humble woman too, for in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female—we are all one in Him.

We offer prayer unto God, knowing that it ascends to heaven like sweet odors before the throne. We offer praise, believing that “Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth God.” “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Jesus has made us priests and kings unto God, and even here upon earth we exercise the priesthood of consecrated living and hallowed service, and hope to exercise it till the Lord shall come. When I see then Joshua the high priest, I do but see a picture of each and every child of God, who has been made near by the blood of Christ, and has been taught to minister in holy things, and enter into that which is within the veil.

But observe where this high priest is, he is said to be “*standing before the angel of the LORD,*” that is, standing to minister. This should be the perpetual position of every true believer. I have no business on the bed of sloth. I have no right to be wandering abroad after private business. I can claim no time which I may set apart to my own follies or to my own aggrandizement. My true position as a Christian is to be always ministering to God, always standing before His altar.

Do I hear you ask how this can be, with your farms and with your merchandise? Know you not, brethren, that whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, you may do it all to the glory of God. Understand you not that every place is now God’s temple, and that everywhere is God’s altar, and that you can as truly serve Him in your daily callings as in the assemblies of the place of worship? You know not the true position of a Christian if you fancy that you are only priests on the Lord’s day, and only to minister before God when you stand in the congregation of the faithful.

You are appointed priests like your Lord, *forever*, and you are forever to be offering the sacrifice. By day and by night should your hearts be going up to Him. You should fall asleep with your Master’s name upon your tongue, and when you awake you should say with the psalmist, “I am still with thee.” Happy Joshua! Notwithstanding the filthiness of his garments, he is to be commended because he keeps in the position to which he is called, and like the servant whose ear was bored, he does not leave his master’s house.

Come, you that profess to be God’s people, if you have been negligent in the duties of your high calling, and if your hearts at this moment are going after vanity, pray God the Holy Spirit to put you into a proper state to perform the functions of your holy office, and now in the courts of the Lord’s house, stand like Joshua, with your hearts prepared by the Lord of hosts to minister before the Lord.

Yet notice where it is that Joshua stands to minister. It is *before the angel* of JEHOVAH. You and I can never stand to minister before Moses, the mediator, under the law, much less before JEHOVAH

Himself, for even our God is a consuming fire. It is only through a mediator that we poor defiled ones can ever become priests unto God.

Peradventure some of God's people here may have forgotten this. You have been searching yourselves and trying your hearts as in the sight of God's law, and you feel very deeply that you are far behind what the glory of the God in the law would ask of you. And therefore you begin foolishly to mistrust your Father's love, and to think that your service before Him will not be speed. Beloved, it is ill serving God in the light of the law—but oh! how blessed is it to stand and minister before Christ and in Christ!

Then, if I can bring Him nothing but my tears, He will put them in His bottle, for He once wept. If I can bring Him nothing but my groans and sighs, He will accept these as an acceptable sacrifice, for He once was broken in heart, and sighed heavily in spirit. Gracious God, I bless You that I have not to present my sacrifice directly to Yourself, else you would consume my sacrifice and me with the flames of Your wrath.

But I present what I have before Your messenger, the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus, and through Him my prayers find acceptance wrapped up in His prayers. My praises become sweet as they are bound up with bundles of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia from Christ's own garden. Then I myself, standing in Him, am accepted in the Beloved. And all my poor, defiled, polluted works, though in themselves only objects of divine abhorrence, are so accepted and received that God smells a sweet savor. He is content and I am blessed. See, then, the position of the Christian as a priest—he is to stand before the angel of the Lord.

Now, read the next word in the light of your own experience, "Clothed," it is said, "with filthy garments." Did you ever feel this when you have come to serve God? Perhaps it is at evening prayer—there has been something amiss in the family during the day, and you know it—perhaps, as the head of the household, you have to conduct prayer, and you feel, "O God, I cannot pray, I cannot pray as I would. I am Your priest in this house, I know, but how can I minister before You, for I have filthy garments on?"

Possibly your business kept you up very late last night. Things are not going on as well as you wish in matters of trade, and you have come here distracted. And while sitting in the pew listening to God's people as they praise the Lord, you have thought, "Ah! I have my filthy garments on. I cannot pray to Him. I cannot praise Him as I would."

I know what it is to come and preach to you sometimes, and to feel such an overwhelming sense of my own unworthiness, that, were it not, "Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel," I would not come on this platform again, for it is hard to feel that your garments are defiled even while endeavoring to be God's mouth to men.

Perhaps this afternoon, when you are going into your Sunday school class, you will feel much warmth of heart towards God. You will confess that you are not your own, but bought with a price. You will desire to live unto Him and honor Him, but oh, that dread impediment of conscious guilt—it will make you cry out, "How can I stand before Him who charged His angels with folly, and declares that the heavens are not pure in His sight? How can I hope to have a blessing on anything that I do, when I feel a heart of unbelief departing from the living God? How can I give a blessing to His saints, when I want a blessing myself? How shall I break the bread of Christ with unholy fingers and pour out the wine into His cup with a sinful hand?"

But stop, Christian, do not think of renouncing your priesthood. Do not let a sense of unfitness keep you from your service. Stand where you are, for remember, you are standing in the only place where pollution can be washed away—you are standing before the angel of the covenant. It is before Christ that sin is to be confessed. Confess it anywhere else, your sorrow is not repentance, but remorse.

"What is remorse?" says one. Remorse is repentance made out of sight of Jesus. True repentance is sorrow of sin in the presence of Christ. Foul and filthy as you are, there is but one voice which can speak you clean. Go not away from that voice. There is but one hand which can touch you and make you

pure—stand where that hand is close to you, and still, filthy as your garments are, shun not the face of your best, your only Friend. But breathe out this prayer, “Lord, if You will, You can make me clean. Purge me, oh, purge me now, for Your love’s sake.”

II. Let us turn to another individual who figures in the group. We have, in the second place, AN ADVERSARY.

Satan stood before the angel to resist Joshua. Does not his opposition seem superfluous? Poor Joshua feels enough the filth upon his garments, without needing to have the devil to withstand him. And I, poor I, do often feel so much my own sinfulness, that it seems a work of supererogation on the devil’s part to lay accusations—conscience accuses enough without him. But yet so cruel is he, that he avails himself of the times of the weakness of God’s people, there and then to resist them.

Observe what he is called. He is called *Satan*, which signifies *an adversary*. He is an adversary and that by nature. His nature is now so vile that he cannot help being the adversary of everything that is good. From the day on which he was expelled from heaven, and dragged with him a third part of the stars of glory, he has been God’s bitterest foe. And as to man, from the hour in which it was said, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” he discovered in that humble creature man, his great destroyer, and he has never ceased to nibble at the heel of the seed of the woman, foreknowing how terribly his head is to be bruised.

There is something, however, very comforting in the thought that he is an adversary. I would sooner have him for an adversary than for a friend. O my soul, it were dread work with you if Satan were a friend of yours, for then with him you must forever dwell in darkness and in the deeps, shut out from the friendship of God. But to have Satan for an adversary is a comfortable omen, for it looks as if God were our Friend, and so far let us be comforted in this matter.

Yet remember, Satan is an adversary not to be despised. Of keen intellect, ripened by years of experience, with a fullness of cunning and craft which made even the serpent, when possessed by him, more subtle than any other beast of the field, he is an antagonist worthy of angelic might. Gabriel might lose in such a conflict, if he did not stand clad in the golden armor of perfect innocence. We, so apt to sin, carrying about with us so much tinder, have need to fear the fiery sparks which he scatters.

It is a dreadful thing to stand foot to foot with Apollyon. Read Bunyan’s description of Christian’s fight in the Valley of Humiliation, and you have there a shadow of what the true conflict is. Better to endure all kinds of temporal pains and trials, than to be beset by Satan. He who wins gains nothing, and he who fails will find his weight full heavy when the dragon sets his foot upon his neck. You have a stern adversary here, and one who will never cease to vex you till you shall be out of gunshot of him, in having crossed the river of death.

Now you will perceive, if you look at the passage, that this adversary *selected a most fitting place* in which to do Joshua damage. He came to accuse him before the angel—before God’s own Son. Oh! if he could once make the Lord loose His hold of us, then we should soon be his prey. You perceive he does not attack Joshua first, but he comes before the angel to prevent Joshua’s being accepted. If Satan can once persuade you or me to think we are not God’s children and not accepted, he knows that he has done us serious injury.

In the arsenals of hell there are great stores of “ifs”—“ifs” are Satan’s bombshells, “If thou be the Son of God.” If he can make you doubt, then he makes a breach in your wall. If you are strong enough to say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him,” you will then come off more than conqueror.

But the drift of Satan is to touch you just there, in that place where your strength lies. He is like Delilah. He feels that if he can cut off the locks of your faith, where your strength dwells, then he may put out your eyes, and sell you to the Philistines forever.

Take care, take care, when Satan comes to accuse you before the angel and to make you doubt your interest in the Lord Jesus, that you at once leave the case in the angel’s hands, for your Advocate can plead better against the accuser than you can, and it is best for you to hold your peace, and to let that

great Advocate stand up and to say, "The LORD rebuke thee, Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee."

You will agree with me that the adversary not only selected a very fit place by coming at once to the throne to lay the accusation, but *a very fit opportunity*. Joshua had his filthy garments on. Satan is a great coward—he will generally meddle with God's people when they are down. I find that when I am in good physical health, I am not often tempted of Satan to despondency or doubt. But whenever I get depressed in spirit, or my liver is out of order, or the head aches—then comes the hissing serpent, "God has forsaken you. You are no child of God. You are unfaithful to your Master. You have no part in the blood of sprinkling," and such-like things.

You old rascal! if you say as much as that to me in my days of health, when my blood is leaping in my veins, I shall be more than a match for you, but to meet me just then, when you understand that I am weak, ay! this is just like you, Satan. What a thorough devil our enemy is! I can call him by no worse name than his own, but if worse there were, richly would he deserve it.

You must expect, Christian, when you have lost your sense of justification, when you are conscious of sin, when you feel unfit to minister before God, you must expect that just then he will come to accuse you. If Joshua's garment had been perfectly clean that morning when he went to minister as a priest, Satan would have let him alone.

But see Joshua depressed in spirit and heavy in mind, weeping over his sins, then comes Satan, and he says, "Now, I shall speed with him. God will hate Joshua, for He cannot bear filth. He will be sure to cast away the filthy priest. And Joshua is hating himself too, and so I shall plunge him in despair, and make an end of the man."

Surely, so it would have been if the angel had not been there, but the angel of the Lord, by His presence, is ever a wall of fire round about His people, and a glory in the midst. If the lion of hell comes prowling forth to seize the very weakest lamb, the great Shepherd will deliver the lamb out of his teeth—nor shall the infernal lion rend the meanest of His sheep.

Commentators have puzzled themselves to know what Satan would have to say against Joshua. As I read their conjectures, I thought that it would never have puzzled me, for my question would be in my own case, which one out of the fifty thousand things the devil would choose to bring? Not what he could bring, but I say, which one out of fifty thousand things he would choose to bring?

Truly, dear friend, if Satan wants to accuse us, any page of our history, any hour of any day will furnish him material for his charges. Yesterday you were impatient, the day before you were proud, another day you were slothful, on another angry. Oh, what a den of unclean birds the human heart is! I would God we could wring their necks, but they are too many for any power less than divine to destroy them all. One chirps at one time and one at another, and between them they maintain a grievous discord.

Talk of perfection in the flesh! the man who dreams of it is either a fool or a knave, one of the two. He is either a fool and does not know his own heart, or else he is a knave before God, and is dishonest, and does not call that sin which is sin.

Perfection in the flesh! Why, those believers who live nearest to God and have the deepest experience of divine things will tell you they have given up that dream long ago. They never expect to be perfect except in Christ Jesus, and never to be complete in themselves but only to be complete in Him. If the old accuser wants reasons for accusation, he may indeed find as many as he wills, and continue to accuse as long as ever he pleases, for we are altogether as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

I have heard of a certain divine that he used to always carry about with him a little book. This little book had only three leaves in it, and truth to tell there was not a single word in the book. The first was a sheet of black paper, black as jet. The next was a sheet of red—scarlet, and the next was a sheet of white without spot. Day by day he used to take out this little book, and at last he told someone the secret of what it meant.

He said, "There is the black leaf—that is my sin and the wrath of God which my sin deserves. I look and look, and think it is not black enough, though it is black as black can be. Then the next, that is the leaf of the atoning sacrifice, the precious blood—the red leaf—how I do delight to look at that, and look, and look again. Then, there is the white leaf, that is my soul, as it is washed in Jesus' blood, made white as snow through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and washing in the fountain which Christ has filled from His own veins."

Ah, that first black leaf! That black leaf! Surely, if Satan looks over it, it will be no puzzle to him to find something against you, for he may continue to plead against you till doomsday, and always find ground in your shortcoming for accusing you before the angel of God.

And what was it that Satan was after, after all, with Joshua? Was it that he hated Joshua's sins? Did he bring these before the angel because he really was vexed that such a sinner as Joshua should defile the courts of God's house? Ah, not a bit of it. It is an edifying spectacle, certainly, to see Satan pleading against sin.

It is sometimes good to turn the tables on Satan, as Martin Luther does, and tell him, "Supposing I am all you say I am, yet what are *you* that you should bring accusations against me? I am no servant of yours, Satan. If my Master does not find fault with me, who am I that I should be afraid, because you assail and accuse me?"

"What are you, after all? You do but look round my castle wall, and smile at every rift, and so tell me where it wants mending! What are you but a fierce dog, keeping me awake by your howling? Better that I have you than be without you, lest I fall into a deadly slumber, and so sleep myself into carnal security and spiritual death. What are you after all, arch fiend, but one who, like a terrible tempest, drives me nearer to my Savior, compels me to find a harbor in His bosom?"

Satan aims at our destruction. That is the point at which he drives. He does not care for our pleasure, it is our total and eternal ruin. Let us know this and never be beguiled by him. In whatever way he puts sin, let us understand it to be sin still, and therefore keep out of his clutches.

When at the council of Basle, a certain cardinal had spoken very fairly about Protestants, the Emperor Sigismund rose and said, "Yes, he talks very prettily, but remember, he is a Roman, he is a Roman still." So when the adversary advances with his blandishments and temptations, remember he is a devil still, though drest in his best robes, and detect him always under any of his various subterfuges—for his desire is at all times and all seasons, your total destruction.

We have now a very gloomy picture before us. We have the poor believer in Christ willing to minister unto the Lord, but quite unable to do so because of his filthy garments. And we have at the same time a clamorous accuser who is crying out before the bar of justice, "Condemn him! condemn him! condemn him!" and well may that poor believer tremble from head to foot as he recollects how true the charge is.

III. But stop, the picture changes now, for THE ANGEL SPEAKS.

He has been silent till now, but now He comes into the foreground. "The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is this not a brand plucked out of the fire?"

Take note that *this rebuke comes at the right season*. When Satan accuses, Christ pleads. He does not wait till the case has gone against us and then express His regret, but He is always a very present help in time of trouble. He knows the heart of Satan, being omniscient God, and long before Satan can accuse, He puts in the demurrer, the blessed plea on our behalf, and stays the action till He gives an answer which silences forever every accusation.

Do not think, Christian, that there will ever come a night so dark that there will be no light shining for you in it, or that Satan will be able to surprise the Savior and take you by storm. At the nick of time, Christ will be sure to be your help.

Observe that this rebuke also *came from the very highest authority*. He says, "JEHOVAH rebuke thee, O Satan." Christ does not merely rebuke Satan Himself, but He prays the Lord to do it. The eternal

God, who is full of justice, says to the accuser, "I have justified, why do you accuse? I accepted My own dear Son in the room and place of the poor sinner with the filthy garments on—why do you accuse?"

That is a joyous utterance of the apostle, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." If God justifies, that very act is a rebuke to all the accusations of the false fiend. Courage, Christian! the voice which silenced your cruel foe is the voice that rolls the stars along, against which nothing can stand.

You must not fail to observe, however, that *this rebuke was founded upon electing love*. You who deny the doctrine of election come here and read this verse, "JEHOVAH rebuke thee, O Satan; even JEHOVAH that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." If God has chosen His people, then it is of no use for Satan to attempt their overthrow.

Christ does not here meet Satan with any "ifs" and "buts," and "peradventures." He does not meet him with those truths which are merely matters of experience, and about which there may be a question. But He meets him with the high mysterious truth which was settled before the world was—He throws as it were this chain into his teeth, and bids him champ that till he breaks his teeth. "God hath chosen Jerusalem." Let that be rebuke enough.

I think your experience will bear out what I now say, that it is all very well to live on spoon victuals, and on milk, when you have no trials and troubles, but if it ever comes to a pinch between your soul and sin, if you are in the deep waters of conscious sinfulness, and Satan is accusing you, nothing will do for your soul to meet the adversary with but the doctrine of sovereign grace.

You may be an Arminian in summer, but you must be a Calvinist in the roaring winds of winter. Arminianism is a very pretty sort of theology for a painted boat upon a glassy lake, but they that do business on deep waters, and weather storms and hurricanes, must have a good substantial bark of everlasting immutable love. Otherwise, if the vessel is not staunchly and well-built, their tacklings are loose, and they cannot well strengthen their mast, and the vessel drives upon the quicksands.

Beloved, in my spiritual building I want to get more and more onto the rock, immediately on the rock. I know I am told that the rock does not yield a harvest, that election is not a practical truth, but after all, if I want a house built, let me have it on the rock, for if it does not yield me any present practical results, yet I must have some comfort—I must have some place to dwell in the storm. I can go out to other fields to sow my corn and reap my harvest, but for my everlasting confidence, I want a rock.

Rest assured that the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic are the only doctrines that can shut the mouths of devils, and fill the mouths of saints in the day of famine and in the time of extremity. "The LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." When I am bowed down under sin, next to my Bible, I love such books as, "*Elisha Coles on Divine Sovereignty*," or "*Dr. Crisp's Sermons*." Albeit that they do not contain all the truth, yet they teach very clearly that part of it which a troubled spirit needs.

Does eternal love ordain sinners to eternal life irrespective of their works? Does the Lord absolutely, out of sovereign mercy, make men to be His children? Did God choose the chief of sinners and does He ever cast them away? Does He say, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy"? Does He declare that He is absolutely justified in doing whatever He wills with His own? Does He on such terms as that choose me? Then blessed be His name, such an election as this just suits my case. And I find that believing the doctrine in that light, I can say to all my doubts and fears, "JEHOVAH that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee."

The rebuke is forcibly applicable to the case in hand. He says, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire." Satan says, "The man's garments are filthy." "Well," says Jesus, "how do you expect them to be otherwise? When you pull a brand out of the fire, do you expect to find it milk-white or polished?" No, it had begun to crack and burn, and though you have plucked it out of the fire, it is in itself still black and charred.

So it is with the child of God. What is he at his best? Till he is taken up to heaven, he is nothing but a brand plucked out of the fire. It is his daily moan that he is a sinner, but Christ accepts him as he is—and He shuts the devil's mouth by telling him, "You say this man is black—of course he is—what did I

think he was but that? He is a brand plucked out of the fire. I plucked him out of it. He was burning when he was in it—he is black now he is out of it. He was what I knew he would be—he is not what I mean to make him—but he is what I knew he would be. I have chosen him as a brand plucked out of the fire. What have you to say to that?”

Do observe that *this plea did not require a single word to be added to it from Joshua*. If you look, Joshua did not say a solitary word. This so silenced the devil that he was speechless. How often Satan has been left nonplussed! He has made up a very pretty case against us—he has caught us in our worst moments, and he has thought, “I will sift him like wheat in my sieve.” His plans would have succeeded, but there was a “but” in his way—(an unfortunate “but” for him, but a blessed “but” for us). “But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.”

Satan is something like Haman. What an admirable plot Haman had laid for the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews! Yes, but there was one little thing which he had not reckoned on—the Jews had a friend at court who lay in the bosom of the king. And so, Satan has often a scheme for the destruction of God's people, but there is one thing which frustrates him, namely, that they have a dear Friend at court who lies in the bosom of the Eternal King, who pleads for them. And while He is there, poor Joshua shall never fail, for the great Joshua, even Jesus his near kinsman, says, “The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

IV. We have not yet entered into the soul of our text, but here it is—A MATCHLESS DEED OF GRACE.

Thus said the angel, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” Here is a picture of sin removed. Do you not think you see him. They have taken off his vestments, every single piece of the robe which was too defiled for him to wear has been taken away, and there he stands. And as the angel looks at him He sees the man's nakedness, but He cannot see any defilement, for the filth is all gone.

So is every pardoned sinner. So am I this morning—so are you, dear brother. God has commanded, “Take away his filthy garments from him,” and as easily as we take off filthy robes, so easily does God take away sin through the atonement of Christ. There is more than that here. The Lord does not only take away the sin itself, but He takes away the consciousness of it.

You feel as if you could not serve God because sin is heavy on you. Look to Jesus, the covenant angel. Hear Him say, “It is finished,” and if you can but lay hold on Him, in a moment you will lose all sense of sin. You will know yourself to be a sinner, but at the same time you will feel that you are a blood-washed sinner—a sinner saved by grace, and your soul, with your Savior's garments on, made holy as the Holy One, will venture close to the throne and stand there unabashed.

That is a delightful sentence where Paul speaks of “having our conscience purged from dead works.” Not merely having the dead works forgiven, but having the conscience purged of them, so that you have no more conscience of sin. Sin is gone. You do not stand now in God's sight as a sinner, but as one who is perfect in Christ Jesus. You have not a sin in God's book against you, but you are absolved. Christ has said it, “Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee.” You have an admirable picture of this in Joshua's losing his filthy garments.

Nor was this all. The order was now given to clothe him, “I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” Christ has performed a complete obedience to the divine law. He had no need to do this for Himself, but He did it for His people. What He did is ours. The perfect obedience of Christ is imputed to every believer.

We wrap ourselves about with the garments of Christ, just as Jacob put on the robes of his brother Esau. And our Father gives us the blessing, because He finds us in our brother's clothes. Oh, this is gracious, for all the righteousness you and I could ever have if we had been perfect would only have been human, but this is divine. Christ is the Lord our Righteousness, and we are sumptuously arrayed in His seamless robe.

Here let me remark that this is matter of experience too, for the believer gets to feel that he can now minister before God without trembling, for he wears Christ's garments. Oh, how delightful it is to preach, dressed in the robes of Christ, or to pray when you feel you have Christ's vestments on! Oh, how fair a thing it is to minister at God's altar, when you know that you are dressed in the white linen, the righteousness of Christ, so clean that even God's all-seeing eye cannot detect so much as a spot or blemish on it.

Pure, lovely, beautiful, without blemish from head to foot in the sight of God is every justified soul. Oh, Christian, never be satisfied unless you know this, and live in the constant enjoyment of it.

Notice one more thing, and I will not keep you longer. The prophet was so astonished to see the alteration which had taken place in Joshua, dressed out in his new and sumptuous apparel, that he broke in upon the vision, and spake himself, "And *I said*, Let them put a fair mitre upon his head." I do not know what business Zechariah had to speak, but truly, if I had seen the vision, I would have done the same.

Gazing through my tears, seeing the Lord's people thus transformed from filthiness to cleanliness, and from shame to beauty, I think I should have said, "Now, Lord, finish the work. Make that servant of Yours to serve You. As he is perfectly clothed, now, Lord, put on the mitre and make him fit to do your work."

Some of God's people appear to me to forget this. They get as far as imputed righteousness and believe themselves to be accepted in the Beloved. There, they are content to tarry. But ah, my soul desires even to say, "Lord, put a fair mitre on the head of every one of Your saved ones." Some of you, I do trust, are saved, but then how little you do for Christ!

My prayer shall be for you, "Lord, set the mitre on their heads. Make them priests—they ought to be such. You have washed them, cleansed them, and clothed them, on purpose that they may be such—but they have laid aside their mitre—Lord, set it on their heads." I pray that you may have it on your head today. That you may in your family, in the Sunday school, tomorrow in your business, in the street, and in the shop, go forth wearing the mitre, ordained to be true priests unto God and exercising your functions, not laying aside your office.

Some act with their mitres as our kings and queens do with their crowns—they only put them on upon state occasions—do not wear them always, because they are too heavy. Oh Christian, your state occasion should be always. You are always dear to Christ and always near the Father's heart. Never take your mitre off. Believers, put it on and go forth from this time forth praising and blessing the covenant angel who in JEHOVAH's name has taken away your filthy garments, and who still stands by!

I like that closing sentence, "And the angel of the LORD stood by." Oh, yes, we want Him always to stand by. When you have your new garments on, when you wear your mitre, you still want His presence. "Abide with us," must be our daily prayer. We want still His strength, His comfort, His smile, the help of His arm, the light of His countenance—for if we have Him not, we shall soon slip from our steadfastness, and have reason to stand again, like Joshua, with filthy garments on.

I have thus preached after a very feeble sort to God's people. There is this voice to sinners. Your case is like that of Joshua—for you have filthy garments on. Do not try to wash them. Nothing is said here about washing the garments, not a word. Do not try to make those old rags any better—there is nothing said about stitching or mending.

Just confess that they are too bad to be mended, too filthy to be washed, and turn your eye to Christ, the wounded sufferer, and pray Him this morning to speak the word, "Take away his filthy garments from him, clothe him with a change of raiment." I tell you, sinner, what He did for Joshua, He will do for you. Oh seek His face and live!

God help you to seek it, and to find it this very morning, and He shall have the praise forever and ever. Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.