

Zech 3

Cleansed and commissioned

Tim Anderson 5/3/2023

One of the things I struggle with in life
is taking gongs seriously.

Do you know what I mean by a gong?

Community recognition of someone's faithful service to the community.

They come in all manner of shapes and sizes.

Lwendyl got a gong at Bayside Christian College
for "outstanding Christian Character."

I didn't mind that gong,
quite liked it in fact.

My old school used to give out gongs
for being the son of a former student.

You didn't have to do anything to earn it.

Just if your Dad went to the school and you did too
they would give you a prize

or put a star against your name in the yearbook or something.

That's the kind of thing that really grates on me.

It's their way of trying to establish the school
as part of the family tradition of privileged families.

So instead of examining which school would best suit their son,
parents would simply do it because that's what our family does.

We're fourth generation old boys of Brighton Grammar.

On a good day, I roll my eyes.

But of course gongs get wider acclaim
than the ones your school gives out.

The Brits have got it down to a tee.

Get a particular gong and you get to be called 'sir'.

But even in Australia we have our 'Orders of Australia'.

I find it pretty hard to take them seriously.

So I was presented with a bit of a struggle
when I was asked to write a reference

for one of my congregation in Yarra Glen.

A good and faithful, hard working church member, she had done the coordinators role in the Combined Churches Op Shop for 20 years, and she was retiring.

Someone thought it might be a nice idea to get her a gong for her services to the community.

And thoughts are going through my mind like,

"the people who get these gongs for services to the Anglican Church are in my experience

the people who have been most damaging to the church."

And

"The people who deserve these gongs the most,

like Peter Adam for example, will never get one,

because they (and their friends who would write the references) are not looking for community acclaim,

they are looking for the praise

that comes only from their heavenly father."

Anyway, I held my nose, wrote the reference,

and she was duly awarded an OAM.

She was tickled pink and proceeded to sign her name with the OAM after it every time she signed.

Including on the hand written vestry minutes.

Well it's a story telling introduction to the question,

"How do we get to be worthy?"

I don't think anyone would argue

that some of the people who get community gongs are not worthy of them.

You might come up with a different list to me,

but we would all agree that some recipients

ought never have been considered let alone awarded.

"How do we get to be worthy?"

It's a vexed question in the community.

Every year there's argie bargie in the newspapers

about who got the gongs and who missed out.
 Were there enough women and other minority groups?
 Are there too many former politicians on the list?

Well "How do you get to be worthy?" is the big question of Zechariah 3.
 Zechariah has a vision of things happening in heaven.

The high priest at the time of Zechariah was a chap named Joshua.
 This is not to be confused with Joshua who fought the battle of Jericho.
 He lived about 800 years before.

This Joshua was the high priest
 because his dad was and his grandfather before that.

It was a bit like the Brighton Grammar method of giving out gongs.
 Joshua had the top job not because of any merit of his own,
 it was because of his family lineage.

But that was the system that God set up,
 so we won't argue about that.

But there was a big question about whether Joshua was worthy.

You see, God had sacked the priesthood.

When Judah went into exile,
 her priests were corrupt.

And so God sacked them.

And he had the temple destroyed.

The Babylonians would never have been allowed
 to destroy God's temple
 if the priesthood had not been corrupt.

And now 70 years later,

in Zechariah's vision,

the high priest stands before the angel of the Lord
 and his worthiness is being assessed.

3:1 "Satan is standing at his right side to accuse him."

Satan means 'the accuser'.

His job is to be the counsel for the prosecution.

It was then, it is now.

He is the accuser of God's people.

And well we know what a sorry state the priesthood was in.
And the Lord passes judgement.

3:2 "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!

The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!

Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Satan would like to bring Joshua the high priest down.

But God will have none of it.

The Lord rebuke you, Satan!

Why? What makes Joshua worthy?

Well it doesn't look like it's anything about Joshua.

"The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!"

That means, God chose to put his name on Jerusalem.

If God's name is going to be attached to Jerusalem,

then there needs to be a way for its citizens to have their sin dealt with.

God can't live in a place contaminated by sin.

And the way the people's sin was dealt with

was through sacrifices made by the priests.

Joshua is worthy not because of how he lives.

He is worthy because he is chosen by God for a particular job.

God chose Jerusalem.

To do that he chose priests and Joshua is the high priest.

As well as being a priest,

God describes him as a burning stick snatched from the fire.

It's another way of saying,

he's rescued not because of anything about him.

God saw him there on the fire,

and God chose to rescue him before he burned up.

It was nothing about Joshua

and everything about God's choice.

How do you get to be worthy?

The message is, it's not to do with you,

it's to do with God choosing you.

We are in a completely different situation.

Neither you nor I are priests.

That is to say,
some people including the diocese may call me a priest.
But in the sense that Joshua was, I am not.
He made sacrifices for the sin of the people.
I only point people to the sacrifice of Jesus,
just like you do, if you are a Christian.
But we don't make sacrifices on their behalf.
Jesus is the priest, we are not.
And for all of us, we are only worthy because God chose us.
God saw you in the fire,
and he snatched you out.

And the similarity between us and Joshua continues.
3:3-4 "Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes
as he stood before the angel.
The angel said to those standing before him,
"Take off his filthy clothes.""
In the Bible, clothes in a vision represent the behaviour of the person.
Clean clothes represents an upstanding and righteous life.
Filthy clothes represents a life stained by sin.
Joshua's filthy clothes represent his complete unworthiness
for the job he is being given.
It's not that Joshua was a worse sinner than anyone else.
It could be that as a representative of the nation as a whole,
his filthy clothes represent the sin of whole nation.
Or it could be that he's just a sinful human being
and in God's sight we are all dressed in filthy clothes.
Whatever the cause of Joshua's moral pollution,
he can't deal with the problem himself.
He can't take off his own clothes.
He needs someone else to take them from him.
But the angel fixes the problem for him.
3:4 "See I have taken away your sin,
and I will put fine garments on you."

The fine garments that are put on Joshua are the garments that God commanded the high priest wear in the book of Exodus. And the same goes for the turban that was put on his head. The disgrace of Israel's sin and his own sin is being removed from Joshua and instead he is made appropriate to be the high priest of the nation. This was a nation that for 70 years had no one acting as its high priest and so had no way to purify themselves from sin.

And then the command that Joshua is given is also the command that is given to the priests in Exodus. 3:7 "If you will walk in obedience to me and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among those standing here."

The promise to Joshua is that he will be able to lead the worship in the temple. And the requirement on him is that he perform his priestly duties with obedience and diligence. There's one more promise to Joshua. It doesn't jump out at you, but it's there.

"I will give you a place among those standing here."

This vision takes place in the heavenly court.

God's on his throne.

The angels are around.

Satan is there to accuse.

Joshua is having his sin soiled clothes removed and the high priestly clothes put on him.

And he is told he will have a place in the heavenly court.

This isn't telling Joshua he's going to go to heaven or something.

It's saying that as he ministers before the Lord in the temple, the temple that is God's residence on earth, that he will be in God's very presence.

So when he prays for the people,

his prayers are going straight before the Lord.

He is the people's access to the presence of God.
It's at about this point that you realise
that parallels with us are breaking down.
Joshua is partly like us and partly like Jesus.
Heb 7:25 says "Jesus is able to save completely
those who come to God through him,
because he always lives to intercede for them."
The high priest interceded before God for the people.
Jesus now does that for us.
And unlike Joshua who would reach the end of his life,
Jesus can do it forever since he always lives.

Zechariah tells us that this cleansing and commissioning of Joshua
for service as high priest is a foretaste of more things to come.
3:8 "I am going to bring my servant the branch."
OK, that's good but who is the branch?
Well from reading Jeremiah we know who the branch is.
It is a king in David's line.
A King who will rebuild the temple that David's son Solomon built.
That makes sense,
there's not much point having a priesthood
unless you have a temple for them to serve in.

The final piece of the vision is the stone with seven eyes.
This is the final piece of the High priest's attire in Exodus.
A jewel that goes in his headpiece.
Once Joshua has that,
he can do his work of making atonement for the sins of the people.
And God's promises is
3:9 "I will remove the sin of this land in a single day."
There was a ceremony that the high priest did once per year.
It was called the Day of Atonement.
The sins of the nation were symbolically placed on a goat
and the goat was driven out of the community.
And another goat was sacrificed to make atonement.

That day of atonement ceremony
couldn't be done without a high priest.
So it hadn't been done for decades in Israel.
And now Joshua is commissioned
to make atonement for the sin of the nation.

You can't read it as a Christian
without thinking forward to the one Joshua points us to.
Who really removed the sin of the land in a single day?
Jesus did.

On Good Friday which we will celebrate in a month,
Jesus removed the sin of the world in a single day.
Unlike the high priest Joshua
who would need to repeat the Day of atonement the next year,
Jesus sacrifice is made once and for all.

In Australia, the sign that life is good
is that you can sit on your back patio,
and enjoy a bbq with friends,
kicking back and chilling out,
sharing stories of what's been happening
over your favourite beverage,
with the smells of the bbq wafting around.
You might wonder with all this talk of high priests and purifying sin
whether it's all something deeply religious
that is far removed from the lives of ordinary people.
God's people in Zechariah's day would not have wondered.
They knew that life is lived before God,
and if the religious part doesn't function
then it stuffs the rest of life up big time.
Think 70 years in exile
and then returning to a shattered land.
The Jews might not have had bbqs,
but they had a picture
of what a life of prosperity and security looked like.

It was sitting under your vine and your fig tree.
 That is, in the shade away from the hot sun,
 with yummy food within easy reach,
 chilling out with friends.
 It's not much different really,
 considering we are separated by 2500 years.
 And that says the Lord Almighty
 will be the result of a priesthood that is cleansed and commissioned.

Cleansed and commissioned is the two word summary
 of what happens in this vision.

First Joshua is cleansed.

His filthy clothes are removed by God.

Does he get cleansed because some kind of outstanding service?

Is it his Order of Israel medal?

No not at all.

He is cleansed only by God's gracious actions towards him.

God rebuked Satan's accusations.

God snatched him out of the fire like a burning stick.

God removed the stain of his sin corrupted clothes.

This part of the vision relates to us.

We too are cleansed only because of God's kindness towards us.

Don't think of your salvation like some kind of religious gong.

It's not an award that God has dished out to you

because of outstanding service.

When Christians start to think that,

we become an unappealing mob.

We get self righteous because we think we are better than other people.

We want to picture ourselves as the younger son,

not the older son,

in the parable of the forgiving Father.

When we truly recognise God's grace in our salvation,

then we will overflow with the attractive love of Jesus.

Joshua and we are cleansed by God's initiative.

And God's initiative alone.

Other times, Christians hear the whispers of Satan.
 You are not worthy!
 It doesn't happen to all of us.
 But some Christians face doubts
 about whether they are good enough for God.
 They know that Jesus died for them,
 it's in their heads.
 But their hearts are still worried.
 Am I worthy?
 Am I good enough for God?
 Maybe they were part of a loveless works oriented church.
 Or maybe they got a picture of God's love
 that was warped by the twisted love other people showed them.
 If your faith is in the Lord Jesus,
 and you have a little voice in your head that says,
 "You are not worthy to be a child of God."
 You know who it is who is accusing you.
 Say to him,
 "The Lord rebuke you Satan!"

The second half of the story is that Joshua is commissioned.
 He is given all of the symbolic parts of the high priest's regalia.
 The fine garments, the turban, the stone that goes in the turban.
 All of them are provided for him by God.
 This part of the vision relates to Jesus.
 Jesus is our Joshua.
 He is the high priest who made atonement for the world.
 He is the priest who stands in the presence of God in the heavenly court
 interceding for the people.
 He is the sacrifice that removes the sin in a single day.
 And if that seems a little distant,
 it is what enables us to sit under our vine and fig tree.
 You can picture heaven like a giant bbq with friends.
 Life as it should be.

The steak is sizzling.
Wine is flowing in moderate quantities
that gladden the heart without fogging the brain.
There are no mosquitoes.
Your friends don't have to rush off to be somewhere else.
That's what our high priest the Lord Jesus is preparing for us.
And the thought of it prompts us to praise him.