

Living On Trial

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- [0 : 00] Zechariah 3, we'll read the chapter. 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.
- The Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?
- Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, Take off his filthy clothes.
- Then he said to Joshua, See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you. Then I said, Put a clean turban on his head.
- So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him. While the angel of the Lord stood by. The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua.
- [1 : 05] This is what the Lord Almighty says. If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts.
- And I will give you a place among these standing here. Listen, O high priest, Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come.
- I am going to bring my servant, the branch. See the stone I have set in front of Joshua. There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it, says the Lord Almighty, And I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.
- In that day, each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree, declares the Lord Almighty. Do you always feel like you're on trial with God?
- What does that look like? Or what does that internal dialogue sound like? Did I do enough? Or is God irritated with me again?
- [2 : 25] I'm not sure if God will bless me. How could he bless me? Look at what I've done or what I did. I'm sure my sin has disqualified me. I wish I could feel worse, because if I felt worse, then God would see how sorry I really am and pity me.
- Or to look at it another way, at the pastor's fraternal this past week, the speaker was taking us through what makes for a happy Christian.
- And he said that in the case of a happy Christian, in the happy Christian life, he said the done is more important than the do. And it's not that the done is instead of the do.
- He's saying that the it is finished is ringing loudly and clearly, and it has more weight than what the do has. So he's saying that the happy Christian life, Jesus' words, it is finished, is there all the time.
- It's there in the morning when you wake up. It is finished. And it's there at night when you go to bed. It is finished. But the depressed Christian, he says, focuses more on the do.
- [3 : 43] I've got to do this. I've got to do that. And the thing is, is all those things might be true. They very well are true. But the question is, is what is your heart resting in?
- Is the trial over? Or is it a new trial every day with God? Are you going to do enough? Are you going to live up to what he wants or not? And, but don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about healthy self-examination.

I'm not talking about spirit-filled, looking into your heart to see, are you obeying? Where are you falling short? I'm talking about stuck on trial.

Stuck wondering, what more do I need to do? What more do I need to do? What can I do? In Zechariah tonight, we see that God's people are on trial.

God's people on trial. And the all-important question of this chapter, the question that it's answering, is how can God bless these people?

[4 : 46] How can God bless them? So far in Zechariah, there's been these fabulous, wonderful blessings. God is going to come. He's going to build Jerusalem. He's going to be a wall of fire around them.

He's going to be a glory within them. He's going to plunder the nations for her. He's going to fill her with overflowing prosperity. Wonderful blessings.

But the immediate question comes up, anytime God is blessing sinful people, is how can this be? How can God bless them? And more importantly for us, how can God bless us?

How can God bless me? Because we are sinners. It is true. God is holy. So how can he bless us?

How can he come and live with us? How would his coming to us ever be good news? Well, those are questions Israel must have asked.

[5 : 47] Yes, Zechariah, these promises are wonderful that you're giving to us. But what about our sin? We just can't pretend like it didn't happen. We just can't pretend like it's not there.

And it's a question that Israel had to ask. And it's a question that we as a church have to ask. Why will God bless us as a church? Is it because we have right theology?

Is it because we have right God-centered worship? Is that why the Lord Almighty will continue to bless us? But despite all those good things, what about our sin?

What about our sin? Because none of those things wash away sin. None of those things cleanse sin. And so the question that we as a church have to ask is, if God is holy and we are a sinful people, on what grounds is he going to bless us?

But it's not only a question that we as a church have to ask. It's not only a question that Israel had to ask. It's a question that I have to ask.

[6 : 59] And you have to ask. And it's a question that you are answering, rightly or wrongly, good or bad. You're answering this question all the time. It's a question that I have to answer every time I'm sitting there waiting to preach.

Let me tell you, in those moments when I'm getting ready to come up here, just like Joshua is getting ready to go before the Lord, a lot of times right before I preach, the devil is there working on me, saying, what about what you did?

What about what you said? And he begins to point out the evil that I did. And in those moments, that's where you see how important it is to have a clean conscience.

But even more than that, how important it is to cling to Jesus Christ, to his righteousness, to say, yes, Satan, that is true, everything you said, but Jesus Christ died for me.

And so, my basis of asking for blessing is not what I've done, but what Jesus has done for me.

[8 : 16] So you see this question of, living on trial, or how God can bless a sinner. It's a question we all have to answer, and it is a question that we all, in one way or another, are answering.

It's a heart-level question. It's heart-level, street-level living, and it touches my calling, it touches my comfort, it touches my hope, it touches my life, the peace and the hope and the joy that we just sang about.

It's touching each one of those things. How can I experience those things in my life? The God that I have to do with is holy, and I have sinned.

So where am I going to find hope and confidence and happiness and peace and joy? Well, it's that heart-level stuff that Zechariah chapter 3 is answering, is diving into.

And so, in Zechariah 3, he comes in with glorious words of grace. Wonderful words. Now, Zechariah 3 begins with Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord.

[9 : 21] He's standing before the Lord, and he's getting ready to serve the Lord, but now he's on trial. It says, then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord.

So Joshua, the high priest, is standing before the Lord, and that word standing has two different meanings, and probably in this case, it's carrying both meanings. The word standing is used very often in the Bible to describe how the priests come before the Lord.

They're going to stand before the Lord and speak for the people and offer and represent the people. So priests serving before the Lord is priests standing and making offerings before him.

So Joshua is representing the people before God. That's what a priest does. That's what Jesus does for us. So he's standing there, but he's also standing in the sense of he's on trial.

And that's the predominant sense here. He's standing before the angel of the Lord, and it's not just a worship scene. It's a trial scene. He's on trial.

[10 : 27] And because he represents all of God's people, they are on trial. God's people are on trial. And so you should see yourself here.

Joshua is not just a man far, far away a long time ago. He's a picture of us. He's a picture of God's people. And so see yourself there. You are pictured, if you're a Christian, if you're one of God's people, you are pictured in this man.

And so the story isn't just about him, and it's not just about Israel. It's not just about a long time ago. You are here. He's on trial before the Holy One. And he's not standing alone.

He has Satan standing right at his right hand, his right side. Now what does Satan mean? It means the accuser. And so here in this place, Satan is playing the outraged prosecutor.

The outraged prosecutor. And this is one of his masks. He puts on the mask of an angel of light, and he parades as one who is so offended by our sin.

[11 : 39] And he parades and pretends to be so interested in God's holiness and protecting God's holiness. And so you can picture him there in his three-piece suit, accusing, playing the outraged prosecutor.

I can't believe the wickedness that I see here. I can't believe how far they've gone down this path. Look at how dirty he is. I am offended, and this is outrageous, and so you should be offended as well.

And so he's indignant. Judge, it's not right. It's not right. Look at them. Look at what they've done. And there he is, accusing Joshua, accusing us.

Now, we have to make it worse before we can make it better. Because all of Satan's accusations would do him no good if it was not the case that he had God's law, if it wasn't the case that he had God's law on his side.

Because in his right hand, he does have the law of God. He has God's expectations. He has God's rights. He has God's glory on his side.

[12 : 48] The law of God is nothing less than how does the glory and the holiness of God fall on men? What do men, creatures, owe their creator?

And Satan has that on his side. And so God's law is nothing less than what man owes to God because he's holy, righteous, and pure, because he's the king and the creator.

And so here we are on trial. Satan is accusing us and nothing less than God's law, God's character, God's glory is on his side.

So Paul, looking at the law of God as we stand on trial, he says the law kills. The law kills. The law is our destruction, not because it isn't good, not because it isn't good for us, but because we haven't kept it.

And if we haven't kept it, then the only word that it has for us is death. And Satan is there to point out all of the horrific failure, not just to us, not just to our consciences, but to God himself.

[14 : 00] And so see yourself there. We're in big trouble. How can a holy God bless an unholy people?

And the answer is, he can't. Not as things stand. And so we are in big trouble. There's not going to be hope.

There's not going to be joy. There's not going to be any forthcoming blessing. There's only going to be a fearful prospect of future judgment. And if you are outside of Jesus Christ, this is where you are.

Satan accuses you. Satan is against you. God's holiness is against you. You haven't done enough. You fail too often. The test is over.

And you didn't pass. And there's no do-overs. And it boils down to this. You need a Savior.

[15 : 00] You need a Savior. You need someone to drastically change, rescue you. You need Jesus. And that's who we see next in this passage.

We see our Hebrew. We see our Savior. We see Jesus. And he's the only one that can get Joshua out of this mess. And he's the only one that can get us out of the mess that our sin puts us in.

And so verse 2 says, The Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, Satan. So who's talking? Well, it's the Lord talking to the Lord.

It's the Lord distinguished from the Lord. And so it's no one else but Jesus Christ, our advocate. The one who is himself, the Lord, who speaks on our behalf.

And so he's our defense. He's our defender. He's the one, John says, who speaks to the Father on our behalf. And so here he's not talking to God. Now here he is talking to Satan.

[16 : 00] And like an avalanche falling on a skier, he falls on Satan and says, The Lord rebuke you. In other words, shut your mouth. So what can we say about our advocate?

Except he loves us. Why else would he come to our rescue? Why else would he step in? He's doing what love does. He's coming to our defense. Satan is such a wretch.

He tempts us to sin and then he condemns us for sinning. He tempts us to sin and then when we fall, he bullies us. But Jesus Christ is our older brother who comes in and stands on our behalf.

And so, dear saint, this would encourage you. You don't stand against Satan all by yourself. You don't even stand before God all by yourself. You don't even have to defend yourself because you have an advocate who speaks on your behalf.

And when we start trying to defend ourselves with, this is what I've done or this is how I feel or this is what I used to do or whatever we work as our defense, that's when we've lost the battle already.

[17 : 12] Satan will win because no matter what we pile up or no matter what our past experiences were or what our future intentions will be, they're not going to be enough to get rid of our sin.

And God's not going to be impressed. But God, because he loves us, has sent his son to be an advocate for us. And when Jesus comes into this picture, everything gloriously changes.

Now listen to Jesus' defense. He puts in two lines of defense on our behalf. The first is this, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you.

What's Christ's first line of defense on our behalf? It is this, that God has chosen Jerusalem. God has chosen to save us.

God has chosen us to be his. And so, with that, what can Satan say? What can he say? If God has chosen us, Satan can't undo it.

[18 : 20] So, election. Election is this great tower that no matter what Satan throws against it, no matter his arrows, his catapults, his trebuchets, all the fiery arrows he throws, let him play the outraged prosecutor.

But the tower stands. The Lord knows who are his. He's chosen them. And so, this is the gospel of free grace. It's the gospel of God-loving sinners who didn't deserve it.

He didn't choose me for some good in me. He didn't choose me because I was sinless. He chose me knowing all my sin, all my rebellion from the first day until my last sin on my deathbed, all my sin and all my unbelief.

It's known to God. Every word that comes off my mouth, good or bad, he knows it completely. My past sins, my present sins, my future sins, he chose us not because we are good.

Because we weren't good. He chose us because he loved us. And it says he chose Jerusalem. It doesn't say Jerusalem chose him.

[19 : 39] I didn't choose him. And if it's left up to my choice, there's no confidence there. There's nothing to build on there. That's sinking sand.

Because my wayward heart has chosen a lot of things and then given up on them. I wanted to do this. I chose it. And I thought I did it with all my heart. And now I'm not interested in it anymore.

I've quit loving them. But if he chose me, and if he chose you, dear saint, he chose you despite your sin, regardless of your righteousness.

So he had to say to Israel, the Lord did not choose you, did not set his love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any of the peoples. For you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept his oath, which he swore to your forefathers.

So, why did the Lord set his love on you? Why did he choose you? Because he loved you and he was keeping his promise. It didn't have anything to do with Israel.

[20 : 41] It had a lot to do. It had everything to do with what God wanted and what God had promised. And so, why does Satan have to shut his mouth? Because the Lord has chosen us.

So Spurgeon said, rest assured that the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic are the only doctrines that can shut the mouths of devils. When Satan is whispering his lies and he wants me to look in and on myself, he wants us to look in and on ourselves, it's only the doctrines of grace that will shut the mouths of devils.

But maybe there's someone here and that's their difficulty. I don't know if I'm chosen. This doesn't bring me any comfort.

I just wonder if I'm chosen. If I can know, then I would be comforted, but how can I know? Well, let me ask you, if that's the case, if that's where you are, let me ask you, is Jesus Christ your only hope?

Do you leap for joy to think of Jesus speaking on your behalf and say, yes, that's my answer? When Satan and sin roar, where do you go?

[22 : 06] Do you find yourself going to the cross? Do you find yourself going to that precious blood of Jesus and saying, this is my hope, his life, his death?

That's how you know if God has chosen you. Martin Luther was wondering the same thing at some point in his early life. He knew about the doctrine of election.

He saw it, but he wondered, how do I know if I'm one of them? There's no comfort if I don't know if it's me. And his teacher, his spiritual father, a man named Staupitz, told him, Martin, seek your predestination in the wounds of Christ.

Those are wise words. Where do you find your, find out if you're chosen? Where do you find your election? Personally?

Well, not in your feelings. You don't wake up one day and feel elect, chosen. Election's not something you feel. It's not something you believe first and then you go to Christ.

[23 : 19] You don't figure out if you're chosen and then you go to Jesus for salvation. That's what a lot of people figure in their mind. Well, I don't know and what's the point of going if I don't know? Some folks want to know if they're chosen before they come to Christ, but that's to get it all backwards.

If you are waiting to know and feel that you've been chosen, then you're seeking it in the wrong place. Where do you seek it? Where do you find it? You find it in Jesus Christ, in his wounds.

So seek your predestination in the wounds of Christ. So you go there, you go to Christ dying for you, his blood. You don't find out your election first and then you go to Christ. You go to Christ's blood as it's offered to sinners.

You said, Lord, that whosoever would come, you will no wise cast them out, you will receive them and so you go to Jesus Christ and you crash into his arms and you let him carry you and you say, I need forgiveness.

And if you need forgiveness, it's in his wounds and if you need cleansing, it's in his blood. And when you are at Christ and when you are resting there, then you can say, ah, the Lord has chosen me.

[24 : 31] So that's our advocate's first defense. Satan, stop talking. Stop blustering. The Lord has chosen them. What comfort there.

What peace there is. To think from all of eternity past, he had his love set on me. He chose me. He's loved me for that long.

Now then look at Christ's second defense for us. Is not this man a burning stick? Snatched from the fire. Now, what's he talking about there?

Well, Joshua and all the people, they had already been saved out of Babylon. They'd already been saved out from exile in Babylon. And God had already seen them on fire.

He's already seen them in danger and he had rescued them. The Lord had reached out his hand and taken them out of that foreign place, that foreign city. And so, after doing that, after seeing them in danger and then reaching out and rescuing them, is he going to now like throw them back into the fire and be done with them?

[25 : 41] If God had shown mercy to Joshua, then surely he meant to save him. One commentator writes this, If God had wished to let them perish for their sin, the Lord would have left them in Babylon.

But by snatching them from the flames of exile, he revealed that his grace was greater than their guilt. Now, Paul argues the very same point.

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. So remember, the question that we're answering or trying to ask ourselves here, How can a holy God bless me?

Where's my hope and where's my confidence? Well, here's some place that will give you rest. It's right here. Bring your heart to this. If he wanted to let me perish, then wouldn't he have just left me alone?

Wouldn't he have just left me in my sin? Why go the bother of saving me and convicting me and bringing me to Jesus Christ if he's just going to throw me away at some other time?

[26 : 52] He saw me in my distress and he reached into the flames and he plucked me out. After plucking something out of the fire, are you going to just turn around and throw it back in?

So who runs into a burning house to grab some sort of precious treasure and then when he's done all that, just throws it away in the dumpster?

Yeah, it's dirty. And yeah, it's smoky. And yeah, he had to run into the fire to get it. But all that running into the fire makes it more precious, not less.

And so that's you, dear saint. That's us. Jesus saw us in deep distress. He ran into the burning house for us. And yeah, he plucked us out and now we're covered in soot and we're smelly and we're smoky and we're burnt on one end.

But you're his. He saved you. He pulled you out. And he's going to finish what he started. And again, against that kind of grace, what can Satan say?

[28 : 03] What can conscience say? See, this isn't quieting your conscience with I've done this and I've done that or I'm doing enough or I'm enough and this is my history, this is my background.

It's none of that. It isn't going back on trial again. It's going to something higher. It's leaving everything about me behind and saying, no, look at the Lord's love for me, God's love for me and saying, this is who I am.

Praise God. I'm a man snatched out of the fire. I'm a woman snatched from the fire. And if he pulled me from the wreckage of sin and ruin, now is he going to let all the powers of sin and hell overthrow me?

Well, never. So trials may come. Storms may happen. But above all that fury and above all the tumult of living, Jesus is saying, you're mine.

You're mine. And with that, our advocate is done speaking to Satan. He arrests his case. We are chosen. We are redeemed.

[29 : 15] And so Satan's accusations are dead in the water. Trial is over. But again, we have to ask, what about sin? Election in God's grace doesn't just magic away sin.

None of that actually does away with sin. But Good Friday is coming. And this Friday, we're going to see where sin is dealt with.

Where sin is not just disappeared, but paid for. Where the greater than Joshua comes and represents his people.

Where the greater than Joshua stood in for sinners. And that is where the question is answered. How can a holy God bless me? How can I stand before him?

How can I with joy appear before his throne? Well, the answer is Jesus died in my place. That's the simplest answer.

[30 : 26] And Lord willing, we're going to come back to this passage this Friday. And we're going to see what the Lord Almighty says. He declares that I will remove the sin of this land in one day.

Salvation, removal of sin is going to happen. It's going to happen on a singular day. And so, do you have a sin problem? Do you have a guilt problem? Do you really need someone to speak for you?

Have you seen Jesus Christ in this passage? He is willing to speak on behalf of sinful people. And so, what do you do? If you have a sin problem, a guilt problem, you're in big trouble problem, well, you go to Jesus.

You go to his office. You go right into his doors and you crash down in front of his desk and you tell him. You said, I've tried my own defense. I need a defense lawyer that will work.

I've tried doing my own thing and none of it has worked. All my arguments are nothing but ashes. Satan has me. God's law is against me. I need a miracle.

[31 : 30] I need saved from this situation. And, it's my happy joy to say, as, so to speak, his secretary, his spokesman, someone who knows him well, he'll save you.

But don't just take my word for it. We saw in Acts, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness through his name. The forgiveness of sins through his name.

So you go to God through Christ. You come with all your sin. You come dirty. You come smelly. You come doubting. You come just as you are. You go to God through Christ. You're leaning on Jesus.

You're saying, he's the one who's going to speak for me. He's the one that's going to rescue me. And, you know what you'll receive when you go to the courthouse? You'll receive the full forgiveness and pardon. You'll receive it all.

And so, the wonderful thing is, Christian, if that is you, if you have come to Jesus Christ, then you aren't on trial anymore. Jesus has spoken for you.

[32 : 35] Jesus does speak for you. And so you can go out in the joy, in the strength that comes from the joy of the Lord. Sin's forgiven. And we're going to see this later.

These clean clothes. And the last one is this clean turban that says, holy to the Lord. There we are. All new. Ready for service. That's you.

And so, rejoice. Rejoice in what the Lord Jesus has done for you. Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus, you are a mighty Savior.

A wonderful advocate. Such a defense attorney. Thank you that when we were in such a desperate situation, you not only spoke on our behalf, but you went into our shoes and you suffered the penalty for our sins to set us free.

And so thank you that we can be cleansed. And we can be set apart to God. And we can say, and we can rest, that we are yours.

[33 : 48] We are yours. You have saved us. You have plucked us from the fire. Help those things to inform our identity of ourselves. Help us, help those things to encourage us to obedience and sacrifice and duty that we would run and strive all the harder because we have such a wonderful Savior who has loved us.

And we have such a wonderful God who has loved us. Because it was out of the fullness of your heart that Jesus Christ came. So we thank you. And we ask that you would please work powerfully in those who are lost, that they might see just how bad the situation is.

And then fall. in Jesus' arms and let him rescue them. I pray that you would work powerfully, grant repentance, repentance from our evil deeds, but also repentance from our self-righteousness.

I pray that you would do this for Jesus' sake, that he might be glorified, that he might be exalted in our estimation, that we might think more highly of him and more highly of you.

We ask this in his name. Amen.