

May 6-10, 2024 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of ^Jesus Part 123

What Makes A Person Unclean?

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to spend some time looking at a question Jesus addresses in Mark chapter 7 when a group of Pharisees came to see Him. They saw Jesus and His disciples eating without doing something that the Pharisees considered to be one of the most important things a Jew should do- wash your hands before eating:

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were unclean, that is, unwashed. Mark 7:1-2 (NIV)

It's a pretty good question. Even our moms would think it was a good idea but Jesus and His disciples didn't do it- at least not in a way that would have made the Pharisees happy. I'm sure Jesus washed any dirt off of His hands before eating but that's not what the Pharisees were getting at. What they were getting at goes much deeper and their washing habits went much farther than simply cleaning off any dirt on them. Mark explains what was going on:

(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) Mark 7:3-4 (NIV)

Did you notice there are parentheses around Mark's explanation? That's because Mark's original audience wasn't Jewish and so he knew they would have no idea what the Pharisees were getting at. In his explanation Mark makes it clear that this was a matter of religious ritual- not of hygiene. They washed because they were afraid that maybe while out and about they had touched a gentile (anyone who isn't Jewish) or a sinner or maybe they touched something that a gentile or sinner had touched and so had become unclean without even realizing it. They washed as a purification ritual to cleanse them of any impurity they might have picked up while around other people.

Now I know it's easy to ridicule the Pharisees. When it comes to targets in the gospels they are low hanging fruit but for today can we spend a minute realizing we do the same thing? This is something we all do. All. Of. Us. We don't necessarily think of it as a ritual of purification but all of us somehow sense the need for purification and the need to be cleansed. We may not feel the need for purification all the time- in fact we'll look tomorrow at ways us modern Americans try to cleanse ourselves or at least cover over the impurity that we sense is there- but all of us from time to time are hit with the blinding realization of just how messed up we truly are. Why is that? Well, according to the Bible it's because at our core all of us are messed up and defiled:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:8 (NIV)

Now I know this is not the way we Americans usually think of the heart. People will often tell you to follow-your-heart but is that really good advice? I guess it can be if your heart belongs to God but even then we have to be careful about following our hearts. Why? Because our hearts are at best stupid and at worst completely deceitful. I have a feeling we could all talk for hours about a time in our lives when we followed-our-hearts and the results were disastrous. I know I could. But what's mind boggling is, even the apostle Paul could talk about

how messed up our hearts (including his own) really are. In Romans chapter 7 Paul goes around and around talking about something you may be able to identify with- I know I can:

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway... I have discovered this principle of life- that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. Romans 7:18-21 (NLT)

Sound familiar? I know, ouch. That's the gist of Romans chapter 7. What's he saying? He's saying we all have the need and inclination to deal with our own unrighteousness and impurity. At the end of the chapter Paul almost cries out- but with pen and paper (or probably it was pen and papyrus originally):

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Romans 7:24 (NLT)

And if that was the end of that chapter then it would be the most discouraging passage of scripture in the entire Bible. But it's not. Paul finishes the chapter up like this:

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? **Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.** Romans 7:24-25 (NLT)

What's Paul getting at? I think the same thing Jesus will be getting at with the Pharisees- that all of us have a deeply ingrained sense of just how messed up we are and we are constantly looking for a way to clean ourselves up. But as Jesus will make plain to the Pharisees- the only way to be made clean is through Jesus.

Tomorrow we'll look at some of the ways we try to clean ourselves up but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on when the last time was that you were brought face to face with just how messed up you really are. And then offer up a prayer of thanksgiving to God that He didn't leave us to fend for ourselves but sent the One who would make it possible to be made clean.

Tuesday Reflection: Yesterday we saw the Pharisees complain that Jesus was not washing "according to the traditions of the elders". Exactly what does that mean? Who were the Pharisees accusing Jesus of disobeying? Well God- at least indirectly. Let me explain what I mean by indirectly by talking a bit about the traditions of the elders. Who were these elders? In order to understand that we have to go WAY back to the book of Exodus when the Israelites were wanting in the wilderness for 40 years. God tells Moses to choose 70 elders to help him bear the burden of administering the Law. These elders (according to the Pharisees) received what is called the "oral Law" from Moses- things that were not written down in the law of Moses. And these elders supposedly communicated these oral laws from generation to generation. The Pharisees believed they were the descendants of these 70 elders and so they and they alone knew the oral law that was never written down but was contained in the hearts and minds of the Pharisees.

So when they ask Jesus why He and His disciples don't wash they aren't accusing Him of breaking the written law that anybody could check for themselves but they accused Him of breaking their laws handed down from the 70 elders:

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" Mark 7:5 (NIV)

Tuns out Jesus didn't think much of the oral law. In fact He called these oral statutes the traditions-of-men (which I'm guessing the Pharisees didn't appreciate). In fact, Jesus is going to expose what the Pharisees traditions were ultimately all about- they were trying to justify and cleanse themselves. And before we start piling on the Pharisees maybe we should take a step back and recognize that we all do this. We all want to and try to justify ourselves. We all want to clean up our own messes. The Pharisees did it through ritual washing (and other things as well). Most modern Americans don't try to clean up our own unrighteousness through ritual washing but we all have a go-to when it comes to covering up the messes in our own lives. The Bible calls the things we turn to when we come face to face with just how messed up we truly are idols.

I know we don't use this terminology much but an idol is anything that we use to cover up and push back down our feelings of guilt, shame and regret. The most obvious way we as humans do this is probably chemical addiction but even if you've never used drugs or alcohol to mask your own guilt and regret, you still have assuredly used another idol to deal with it. People will turn to money, power, success, pleasure and even relationships to mask their guilt. And while there's nothing wrong with most of the things we turn to in order to mask our guilt the problem is that masking our guilt doesn't get rid of it. From time to time it will rear its ugly head and we have two options at that point- face whatever it is that's causing the guilt or double down on whatever we're using to mask those feelings. There's two problems with this strategy- the first is that when we turn to an idol to mask our guilt there are consequences:

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. Jonah 2:8 (NIV)

Please don't forfeit the grace that could be yours by turning to an idol when you experience guilt. When we turn to an idol to mask our guilt it just gives us more to feel guilty about. It doesn't solve our problem- it just masks the problem. The Pharisees tried to mask the problem with ritual washing. We try to mask the problem with drugs or alcohol or work or pleasure or...

But the other problem with using an idol to mask our guilt is really the same problem- it keeps us from turning to the only One who can heal that guilt (rather than simply masking it) which I guess is going to keep you from the grace that could be yours. The point is, all of us do what the Pharisees do unless we can be made aware of our habits and foolish attempts to deal with our guilt on our own.

Tomorrow we'll look at why the "elders" believed that ritual washing was so important and so powerful but for today maybe spend some time thinking about what your go-to idol is. How do you attempt to mask any guilt or regret you might feel because of your own actions?

Wednesday Reflection: So far this week we've looked at the fact that we all experience these feelings of guilt and have a deep sense of our own unclean-ness. We often try to ignore those feelings but eventually they bubble to the surface and when they do we

all try to self cleanse- in other words we all try to deal with the feelings of guilt on our own through various means. But there's a bigger problem at work according to Jesus- our attempts to self cleanse our own guilt just don't work. Why not? Because as it turns out guilt and shame and regret are an inside job:

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." Mark 7:7-8 (NIV)

It's not just that trying to deal with our guilt on our own drives us away from the only One who can heal us and take away our guilt and feelings of unclean-ness- the other issue is that it just doesn't work so it's a terrible strategy. The Pharisees tried to deal with their own inadequacies through ritual washing (among other things) but no matter how much they washed, Jesus says they could never be made clean through ritual washing because their guilt doesn't come from without- it comes from within.

There was a movie that captured the imaginations of the people of my generation- especially the girls. It was called When A Stranger Calls and it really freaked a bunch of people out. The whole movie was about a girl who was babysitting gets all these calls from a guy who's trying to scare her. She ends up getting the police involved and the climax of the movie occurs when the cops finally figure out where the calls are originating from (this was pre cell phone times). In one of the most dramatic moments in teen-horror-movie history the cops call the young lady and tell her, "we traced the call- it's coming from inside the house- GET OUT NOW!"

We should all be aware that guilt works much like that movie. Jesus has traced where your guilt and feelings of unclean-ness are coming from but you can't get out or get away from them because those feelings are coming from inside our own hearts. We can try to wash those feelings away but it won't work because the stains are not external but internal. In the Shakespeare play Macbeth (a play I may or may not have gotten kicked out of when I was in junior high and our class went to the Shakespearian festival in San Diego so we could be exposed to high culture but that's a story for another day ;o) Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to kill Duncan. But after Duncan's death Lady Macbeth struggles with the guilt. She sleepwalks and in her dream state she's constantly trying to wash away a "spot" that nobody else can see.

But she sees/senses it. She can't wash it off and it's driving her insane. What's going on with Lady Macbeth? Guilt. She can't wash it away because the guilt is internal. She couldn't wash away the guilt she was experiencing and neither can we. The entire New Testament is a testament to the fact that we can't save ourselves. That we can't cleanse our own guilt. Maybe nowhere is it more clearly spelled out than in this passage:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Paul wants to make sure we fully understand- he says "this is not from yourselves". It is only by the grace of God that we can be and are saved/healed/made clean. It's a hard truth for us to accept because we all want to be able to stand before God on the strength of our own record and be allowed entrance into the kingdom of Heaven because of our own merits. The

problem is we can't save ourselves and when we try we just make it worse and we end up like Lady Macbeth feeling dirtier and dirtier and guiltier and guiltier with no relief and no progress in cleaning ourselves up. Over time it will destroy us just as surely as it destroyed Lady Macbeth.

Tomorrow we'll look at what will cleanse our guilt but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on times in your past when you've seen someone (maybe yourself) trying to self-cleanse the guilt from their lives and how that went for them.

Thursday Reflection: So far this week we've looked at what doesn't work to heal/save/clean up the human heart. For the next two days we'll look at what does work to heal/save/clean up our hearts and it turns out there's only one thing that will do the trick- Jesus:

Jesus went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come-sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person." Mark 7:17-23 (NIV)

Jesus tells us that the Pharisees can wash their hands all they want but it won't work because (as we saw yesterday) guilt is an inside job. It's not something external that can be cleaned up with soap and water. He tells us again that our problem comes from within and then He lists off a bunch of things that cause guilt and a sense of unclean-ness in our hearts. The list is an interesting one- it's pretty much a list of things that wouldn't cause us a problem if we were willing to live according to the 10 Commandments.

I know the 10 Commandments have a bit of baggage for us and part of that is what we call them- commandments. That's not really what the Hebrew Bible calls them. The word we translate into English as "commandments" is probably better rendered as "instructions". The 10 Commandments are God's instructions for how to live successfully as we relate to God, others and ourselves. What's interesting is how we have this impression like the 10 Commandments are an impossible standard to live up to but are they really? Think about it for a minute- God starts out instructing the Israelites that if they are going to choose Yahweh for their God then they can't worship other gods. Seems reasonable to me. Then He instructs the Israelites not to kill each other, steal from each other, take another person' spouse and so the instructions go. And we look at that list and think, "who am I, God?!?!"

Who could ever live up to such an onerous set of instructions. But what's funny is this- I'd bet good money that when we read the 10 Commandments we think to ourselves, "that's how I would like other people to relate to me. Don't kill me. Don't take my stuff. Leave my spouse alone." In fact when someone breaks one of the 10 Commandments while relating to us we are quick to condemn those worthless scoundrels. How could anyone do such a thing? That person should suffer for what they did. There's no gray areas when it comes to someone else breaking a commandment against me. But when I break one of the commandments and someone calls us on it then we start talking about how "it's complicated" and there are reasons and extenuating circumstances.

But the 10 Commandments are basic instructions for how to live in harmony with God, others and yourself. And when we violate one of them we don't so much "break" a command

as we reveal how broken we are that we could actually do such a thing. The 10 Commandments as it turns out are not an impossible bar that we couldn't possibly hope to get over as much as the least common denominator for what it means to be a good human. The bar isn't set too high- in fact it's set so low that we have to slither to get under it.

And yet we do. Slither under that bar. Don't we? Hi, I'm Ed and I'm pretty good at slithering as it turns out. And so are you whether you want to face it or not. And the bad news is, self cleansing our own guilt doesn't work. When we violate one of God's instructions for How-To-Human it brings guilt to our hearts and eventually even the most calloused among us will experience that guilt no matter how much we try to cover it up. Why? Because it's an internal issue and not an external one. And it turns out there's only one thing that can deal with our internal guilt- Jesus:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

Now I know what you must be thinking (and if you're not already thinking it you will be soon)- I thought you said Jesus could heal our guilty hearts but Jeremiah says our hearts are beyond cure and nobody can understand it. Yes. That was absolutely true when Jeremiah wrote those words- 600 years before Jesus' birth. But Jesus would eventually come to give us the one antidote to a guilty and deceitful heart- Himself. And now for those of us who belong to Him we can find peace no matter how guilty our hearts may be. Even if we can't feel it we are promised that a troubled heart is no match for Jesus' power to save so I'll leave you with this verse to ponder for the rest of today:

When our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have peace before God. For God is greater than our troubled hearts, and he knows everything. 1 John 3:20 (NCV)

Thank God for that. And thank Jesus too. Tomorrow we'll look at a vision an Old Testament prophet had that I think pulls all of this together but until then reflect on how much greater God is than our troubled hearts.

Friday Reflection: This week we've been looking at a question that Jesus deals with in Mark chapter 7- what makes a person unclean? The Pharisees were bewildered that Jesus and His disciples didn't ritually wash before eating. The ritual washing (you may remember from earlier reflections) was designed to ensure that person did not become "unclean". We've already looked at how Jesus tells us that all of us experience these feelings of guilt and unclean-ness, that we all try to self cleanse and that self cleansing just doesn't work. So today we're going to look again at what will make us clean (spoiler alert: It's Jesus).

In the Old Testament there's a little prophetic book written by a prophet named Zechariah. Zechariah is one of the minor prophets (theologians determine whether a prophet is a major or minor prophet based solely on how long their book is and Zechariah's book is only 14 chapters so... poor Zechariah is considered a minor prophet) who wrote about 500 years before Jesus' birth. He had a series of visions- one in particular that deals with the question we've been asking this week- what makes a person unclean and what can make them clean again? So let's take a look at Zechariah's vision from chapter 3:

Then he showed me Joshua the High Priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him... Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. Zechariah 3:1-3 (NIV)

Ok there is so much in Zechariah chapter 3 but let's start with who it was that showed Zechariah the High Priest standing before the angel of the Lord. Who is "he" in verse 1? It's an angel. The angel is Zechariah's guide to all of his visions and now the angel shows Zechariah a vision of Israel's High Priest standing before the angel of the Lord (I know you're probably wondering what in the world Satan is doing in this vision and it's not something we're going to get into today but it is very reminiscent of Job chapter 1 and someday I'm going to have to trace all of that out and get it straight in my head but that day is not this day ;o). So let's focus on the angel of the Lord- who is He. Well just about every theologian will tell you that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is the pre-incarnate Jesus. In other words the angel of the Lord is Jesus manifesting Himself before He comes to this world as a baby and becomes a man. It is the more approachable manifestation of God for us humans.

Now Zechariah sees the High Priest, Joshua, standing in the presence of God and every theologian I read all agree that this could only be a vision of one particular day of the year- the Day Of Atonement. The Temple in Jerusalem was a shadow or image of Heaven and/or Eden. It had 3 sections: 1) the outer courts where the Jews would come to worship Yahweh; 2) the Holy Place which was inside the Temple itself and only the priests could go in there to serve and administer the worship of Yahweh; 3) The Most Holy place which was separated from the Holy Place by a veil. Inside the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant and it was a shadow of God's throne room in Heaven. Only the High Priest was allowed into the Most Holy Place and then only once a year- on the Day Of Atonement.

So Zechariah would have immediately deduced that what he was seeing was a vision of the Day Of Atonement and that he was seeing the Most Holy Place- a place that only a handful of humans in all of history ever had the privilege to see. But Zechariah would have been shocked by one detail in his vision- the High Priest's robes were filthy. The word in Hebrew that is translated here as "filthy" doesn't mean it had dirt on it. The word is the Hebrew word for raw sewage. Joshua the High Priest was covered in excrement and urine. Why would that be so shocking to Zechariah?

To answer that we have to look at the preparation that a High Priest went through to be ready to go into the Most Holy Place. On the Day Of Atonement the High Priest would take two goats- one he would sacrifice and catch the blood (which he would sprinkle on the Ark Of The Covenant to "atone" for the sins of Israel for the past year) and the other would be left alive and was called the "Scape-Goat". This Scape-Goat symbolically had placed upon it the sins of all of Israel from the previous year. The priests would take the Scape-Goat out of the city and chase it into the wilderness. And now the High Priest was ready to go into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed goat. But for a week prior to that the High Priest had to go through a series of ritual washing and purification that was pretty intense.

One week before the Day Of Atonement the High Priest would leave his home and family and stay in an apartment in the Temple so that he wouldn't inadvertently be made unclean by touching something that wasn't pure. All week long the High Priest practiced and reflected on what he was to do. There were a series of ritual washings throughout that week so that the High Priest would remain pure but on the Day Of Atonement itself they took things up a notch (or two or three or...). On the Day Of Atonement the High Priest was subjected to a full body ritual washing in public (but behind a screen so the High Priest's modesty was not violated). The people had to know that their representative before Yahweh was as clean and pure as he could possibly be. He didn't dress in his typical priestly garb but wore pure white linen as a metaphor of the purity of the High Priest.

Next the High Priest would make a sacrifice for his own sins after which he would do a full body ritual washing again. Then he would make a sacrifice for the sins of all the priests that were helping him that day after which he would do a full body ritual washing- again. Then the High Priest would sacrifice the goat whose blood he would sprinkle on the Ark Of The Covenant (but no more ritual washings)- he was now considered to be ritually "pure" and "clean". He was now ready to go into the Most Holy Place.

This is the scene Zechariah sees in his vision but there's something terribly wrong with what Zechariah sees- the High Priest (Joshua) was supposed to be pure and clean and approaching the Mercy Seat of God (which was atop the Ark Of The Covenant) in pure white linen. But Joshua is covered in sewage. How could this be? What's going on in Zechariah's vision? I think what Zechariah sees is the reality that we've been talking about this whole week- you can't make yourself clean. You can try. You can do everything you think you're supposed to do and you can wash the dirt off your body but humans can't wash away their own guilt- not even the High Priest. It reminds me of something another Old Testament prophet wrote:

We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. *Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)*

What are these "righteous deeds" that Isaiah refers to? It's our attempts to clean up our own guilt and feelings of unclean-ness. We've already talked ad-nauseam about how well it works when we try to self-cleanse and now we have a vivid picture of what that looks like in the spiritual realms. Even when we've done all we can to clean ourselves up and deal with our own guilt we are still covered in spiritual sewage and sludge.

I intended to finish these reflections today- on Friday- but I now realize that was overly ambitious so we'll finish with another reflection tomorrow where we finish up the vision that Zechariah saw and what it means for our ability to self-cleanse.

Saturday Reflection: This week we've been looking at the question of what makes a person unclean as well as the question, so what can wash away my sins (if you grew up in a church that sang hymns you're already singing the answer to this question in your head)- nothing but the blood of Jesus. Yesterday we began looking at a vision that an Old Testament prophet named Zechariah had of the High Priest (Joshua) standing before the Lord in the Most Holy Place in the Temple of Jerusalem. Zechariah was shocked because Joshua was supposed to be clean and pure in robes of white linen after a week's worth of intense ritual

washing. But if you remember yesterday's scripture reading- it didn't work. At least not in the spiritual realms. In the physical realm Joshua appeared to be bright and shiny and clean and pure. But when Zechariah was shown a vision of what this looked like in the spiritual realms he noticed Joshua's robes (and Joshua himself) were covered with sewage and sludge. The point being, even the High Priest couldn't make himself clean. Not even with the help of other priests and entire congregation of Israel. So what happens next? I'm so glad you asked:

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 fine 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. Zechariah 3:4 (NIV)

This is SO cool- I'm totally geeking out. I never noticed this before so forgive me if I sound a tad excited. The High Priest comes and stands before Yahweh but it becomes obvious that he's not as clean as he thought he was (and neither am I; and neither are you) so the Angel Of The Lord (if you remember from yesterday this is the pre-incarnate Jesus before He's come to this earth and become fully human as well as staying fully divine) does something about it- the Angel Of The Lord takes away Joshua's sin and puts new "fine garments" on Joshua the High Priest. Wait a minute- what just happened? Well I think we just saw what the point of this entire week has been- we saw that nobody can self-cleanse and that Jesus is the only One who can clean us up and take care of the guilt that our sin leaves us stewing in. And then Yahweh tells Joshua the plan for the rest of us:

Listen, High Priest Joshua... I am going to bring my servant, the Branch... and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. Zechariah 3:8-9 (NIV)

Now this is where things get confusing. What I really want to talk about is verses 8-9 but if you read the entire vision you'll notice sometimes it seems like Yahweh is speaking, sometimes it seems like the Angel Of The Lord is speaking and then at the end it is the Lord Of Heaven's Armies Who is speaking. What's going on? I think it's just a sign of how complex God is and how difficult it was (even for the prophets) to fully grasp the nature of God. We know from the New Testament that God is not a simple concept or a simple being to be explained and grasped. God is more than our limited categories could possibly contain but please don't get caught up in all this Trinity stuff. It's important, sure, but it's not what we're trying to get to the bottom of today other than recognizing how God is going to save us.

Yahweh says He will send "the Branch"- a prophetic reference to Jesus. And through the Branch Yahweh will "remove the sin of this land in a single day". What us humans could never do (make ourselves clean and remove our own sin and guilt) the Branch will take care of in a single day. I believe Yahweh was referring to Good Friday. A day when the ultimate High Priest (Jesus) would do in a single day what the High Priest of Israel could not do in a week. And the connections are mind boggling: Jesus shows up without a goat to sacrifice nor a Scape-Goat upon which to lay the sins of Israel for the year prior. Why? Because Jesus would be the sacrifice that would cleanse our sins not just for year but for all time. Jesus would be the Scape-Goat who was sacrifice outside of the city walls (which is exactly where the Scape-Goat was taken). The High Priest in the Old Testaments was washed and cleaned and purified- but only on the outside. Spiritually the High Priest was still covered in sewage and

sludge. But Jesus- while He appeared to be covered in filth- was spiritually pure as new snow. The High Priest was clothed, Jesus was stripped. The High Priest had the support of his fellow priests and entire congregation of Israel. Jesus died alone with no support from His own disciples.

And why did Yahweh allow all of this to happen to His only Son? So that you and I could be clothed in Jesus' Grace and cleansed by His sacrifice. Look at what Paul says Jesus's sacrifice for us means now:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *Galatians 3:26-27 (NIV)*

Did you catch it? Because of what Jesus did we can be "clothed with Christ". What does that mean? Well people who spoke Greek would have known exactly what Paul was getting at. In the Greek theater they didn't do what we would call "character acting" like we see today. Today when Brad Pitt plays Achilles or Shahar Isaac plays Simon Peter on the chosen they don't put on a mask. You see the actor but the actor is playing a part. But we're not confused- we know the actor isn't really Achilles or Simon Peter. But in Greek plays they did wear masks. And throughout the known world those masks were the same. If someone was going to play Achilles or Odysseus or Helen of Troy they put on a mask and costume that everyone knew universally represented that character. You had no idea who the actual actor was and you didn't really care. You just cared about the mask and costume.

When Paul says that we were clothed with Christ he's using a theater term. He's saying that now when someone looks at me in the spiritual realm they don't weak, flawed, messed up Pastor Ed. What they'll see in the spiritual realms is not Ed at all- they'll see the "character" that I've been "clothed" with. Jesus Himself. It's the opposite of the vision Zechariah sees in his vision and is the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise that one day He would send the Branch (Jesus) and in one day He'd do what humans could never hope to accomplish not matter how long we spend trying- He would remove our sin and guilt in a single day.

And you thought the Bible was boring. Isn't that the coolest thing you've ever heard? Ok I'm still geeking out but this is amazing. Please see this. You can't cleanse yourself (and neither can I). Nobody can. But you can clothe yourself with Christ and He can cleanse you of your sin and guilt. How? Paul says it happens at baptism or at least our baptism is a picture of what happens. When we are baptized the water might be able to clean some dirt off of our bodies but it could never remove our guilt and sin without the saving power of Jesus. The water symbolizes us being clothed with Christ so that even if we can still see and feel the impact of our sin and guilt in the physical realms we can rest assured that in the spiritual realms God sees only the flawless perfection of His Son.

So rest today in the knowledge that Jesus has done for you what you could never do for yourself. He has made you flawless (even if you don't feel like it yet).