BC 23; Zechariah 3:1-5; Rom. 4:1-6; 4:24-5:1; Justified Sinners I. Delivered Up for our Trespasses II. Raised for our Justification III. Our Peace Secured

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how are you made right with God? This pointed question from LD 23 brings the concept of Justification before us. Both LD 23 and BC art. 23 share this focus- how can sinners be made righteous? Most of us have memorized the definition of Justification; it goes like this- justification “is just as if I had never sinned.” This is true in so far as it goes- but it misses an important aspect. Not only is it just as if I had never sinned- but it is also just as if I had lived a perfectly righteous life. So today as we look at justification, we will see both aspects- what we call double imputation. Last week looked at Melchizedek the priest king who illustrated the benefits of atonement. This week we are going to consider Joshua the high priest. Now the HP Joshua in Zechariah 3 was a leader of the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem with the blessing of Cyrus. So Joshua, along with Zerubbabel, lead a group of Israelites from Babylon back to Israel. One of the key actions of Joshua was to encourage the rebuilding of the temple. So we have the HP Joshua returning from captivity to rebuild the house of the LORD- you can read about this in the book of Haggai. But the question before us today is this- is Joshua a fit priest? Who is worthy to stand as priest of the Most High God? So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ purifies His priest to serve in His presence unashamed! The cleansing of Joshua illustrates the concept of justification for us.

**I. Delivered Up for our Trespasses**

In our first point, we consider that Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses as we read in Rom. 4. The first side of what we call- the double imputation of justification- is the imputation of our sins to Jesus. Imputation simply means that works have been credited- reckoned as their own. A legal declaration has been made. Stated another way, our sins are put on Jesus Christ and He pays for them. This is why Jesus was delivered up to the cross- this is why He must suffer and die- it is so that we might before forgiven and our sins pardoned. When our guilt and sin is taken from us- it is dealt with by Jesus Christ. Laid upon Him- placed on His account. Seen specifically in His passive obedience, Jesus suffered on our behalf- He was made to be sin- paying the debt that we owed to God’s justice and wrath. He took on the curse of the Law- which led to His being forsaken by the Father on the cross. The end result is that our sins are not counted against us- as David says in Psalm 32, blessed is the man who does not have their sins counted against them. Whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. To illustrate the removal of our guilt, sin and stains, lets consider Joshua the High Priest. As we read in Zech. 3, the high priest is standing before the LORD clothed in filthy garments. The robes of this priest were covered in filth- we can imagine that it would be blood of slain animals- the excrement and entrails of all the sacrifices. Joshua was a mess- he was completely covered in smelly, dirty filth! He looked like someone who just crawled out of the sewer- a mess! Not someone you would want to stand next to- much less someone you would want to be your priest! As such, he would be disqualified to serve as a priest! He could not stand in the presence of God- he could not do his work as a priest while he looked like this! He was disqualified from service because he was so dirty. But the angel deals with this filth by giving a command- remove those filthy garments from him- Zech. 3:4. So Joshua is getting cleansed- the dirty rags are being taken away. And to this command the angel adds this commentary- behold, I have taken away your iniquity from you. You see, children, Joshua was dirty not with the dirty things of this created world- he was dirty with his own sins! His iniquity is what polluted him- made him guilty and unfit for office! His sins were what made his robes covered in filth- and by God’s grace this filth was taken away- His sins were removed- his iniquity was pardoned! In this we see the first half of our justification- the forgiveness of our sins. Even though our sins are like scarlet- our hands are covered in blood- we are washed and made clean- as white as snow! So how should we respond to this truth? What should be the reaction of all the Joshua’s here? Well, those who come to know their sin and misery are called to humble themselves as BC art. 23 says. We recognize that there is nothing in ourselves that can make us clean- nothing we do can clear our name or cancel our debt! We see our iniquity- knowing that we are no better off than Joshua- we too are clothed in the filth of our misdeeds! Even on the best of days- our hearts are divided. We go to church- and our mind is elsewhere. We pray- but we don’t feel very holy. We struggle with worry and doubt. We read God’s Word with unholy eyes- we take communion with stained hands. The very evil we want to avoid we find ourselves doing. So we like David cry out for mercy- cleanse these guilty hands! Enter not into judgment with me- rather take my dirty rags away and make me clean! So Jesus died on the cross to secure our necessary cleansing- His blood washes us and makes us clean. And more than that- He was raised for our justification! He lived and now lives to secure and apply His righteousness to us!

**II. Raised for our Justification**

So the removal of Joshua’s dirty clothes is not the end of the story. Joshua is not left naked- rather he is clothed again! As Zechariah 3 continues- remove his filthy garments and I will cloth you with pure vestments. Now vestments are the robes of a priest- added to that a clean turban would also be placed on his head. So Joshua would be clean and was given new clothes in keeping with his granted purity. Here is where we find the second aspect of our justification. Not only is our guilt and sin taken away, we are also credited with Christ’s righteousness. Or as we find with Joshua- we are clothed with pure vestments! When we are justified, the Father grants and credits to us the righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ. This was purchased for us in His work of Active Obedience. The active obedience of Jesus describes His work of perfect holiness- He kept all the laws of God and fulfills all righteousness. His perfect life and the merits He earned are then granted to me- credited to my account! His life is placed on me like a robe if you will. As we read in Rom. 4:24- righteousness is counted to us who believe. Now it must be clear that Joshua does not robe himself- rather he is granted the robes of another. So it is with us- we do not and cannot earn what we need- rather we are granted or gifted what we need as it has been secured by Jesus Christ! So we are now able to stand- as Joshua did- in the presence of God. We can stand in the temple of God unafraid- and Satan has no grounds to attack or accuse- because we are clean and we are clothed! In fact, we share this office with Joshua the high priest. We are called a kingdom of priests in I Peter 2- a holy nation! Having been justified by God, we are now set apart and equipped- made ready and able to stand and serve. So don’t miss this point- just as Joshua had to rely on someone else to secure the necessary clothing for him- just as David cries out to the LORD to cleanse him and make him clean- so also we who would be justified must cry out and depend on the LORD to save! As we read in BC 23- we rest only on Jesus Christ! We lean on His obedience! The fact is- we can and never will do enough! Not only are we unable to pay for our sins- as we saw in our first point- we are also unable to do enough good! Unlike Adam and Eve who hid and tried to use fig leaves to cover his nakedness- we learn here that our only hope is to rely on Christ to dress us- to cloth us with the pure robes of His righteousness!

**III. Our Peace Secured**

Now that we have considered both aspects of justification- the removal of our guilt and the reception of Christ’s righteousness- what remains is to consider how we benefit- or the peace that is secured for us. As Rom. 5 begins, therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ! We stand by grace! We are washed by grace- clothed by grace! Now we have peace with God! Shalom- all is well! As it was well with Joshua- he could now stand and serve in the temple unafraid and unashamed- we too can stand and serve as priest of God! Our blessedness having been secured- what we could not do has been done and what we could not earn has been received! So the primary application of this doctrine must be this- let us all learn to trust in Jesus Christ and His works alone for our righteousness! As Psalm 130 put it- O Israel, hope in the Lord- for with the Lord is unfailing love and full redemption! Knowing that we are by nature dirty and needing to be cleansed leads us to trust in the only one who can heal and wash us clean! Let us all learn to trust in Jesus and Him alone- trusting Him fully! As our BC art warns- if we had to appear before God relying on ourselves or someone else- alas we would be swallowed up! There is no hope of justification for those who trust in their own works or the works of some other creature! No- the only source of righteousness- the only hope for salvation is found in Christ! So the goal of this sermon is not that would be able to define this doctrine alone- but rather be moved to trust in Jesus Christ alone! Just so that we are clear- our faith is not what saves us in that we trust in our faith! Rather faith is the means by which we are joined to Christ- to rely on Him alone! Saving faith is a trust in Christ’s work- not our own belief! And the second application flows from this truth- since justification is a work of God and God alone- based on the works of Jesus- all praise and glory must be directed at Him alone! As our BC article puts it- giving all glory to God- humbling ourselves- resting only on the obedience of Christ crucified. This is why this doctrine is so important- the foundation of church- the hinge upon which the door of salvation swings. If you get this wrong- you will not trust in the only one who can save!

As we close, our passage in Zechariah 3 is a classic rags to riches exchange. From filth to purity, from poverty to plenty- from guilt to glory- from being accused by Satan to defended by God. Jesus Christ purifies His priest to serve in His presence unashamed! In this is all our righteousness- my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness!