

20020825 seeihavetakenawayyoursins tomdow countryhills

Well, a good morning again to Country Hills. I did so appreciate that testimony, as everybody did. And I remember a lot of years ago when I was a student at Emanuel Bible College, and a number of us were invited to go to North Bay for the weekend, for a weekend.

It was to be the first service of the missionary church in North Bay. And Pastor Earl Panabaker, some of you will remember that name, great church planter in our church a number of years ago. And one of the churches that he started was the Lakeshore Church in North Bay.

So he and his family had put a lot of preparation into it, and then they invited a number of students from Emanuel. I think some of us went up several weekends in advance and went visiting door to door in the area of the school where the services were to start. And we stayed in the pastor's home, and I remember in the home how Mrs. Panabaker would make meals for all of us students, and we'd eat mountains of food.

And then off we'd go and knock on doors and hand out information. And then I'll never forget the Sunday morning that the church was to open. And we got there early.

And I remember it was just like we were just like children. We couldn't wait to see what would happen. Is anybody going to come? Is this thing going to get off the ground? Is our work going to be rewarded? And of course, we had done a great deal of praying in advance of that first service.

And I can recall standing in the foyer of that school and right at the front door, actually, and my nose was right up against the front door, peering out and watching and hoping and praying. Who's going to come? Is anybody going to come? And will any good thing come from Lakeshore Missionary Church ever? Hallelujah. Yes, to the glory of God and thanks to the Panabakers and their vision and other people who kept that work alive over the years and Pastor Dennis and his family and his people.

And many, many, many wonderful things have come from lots and lots of Christian churches, including North Bay. And just one example of that this morning, how grand a story and how extremely well told. Thank you, Heather.

So very, very much. Carolyn, not well enough to come with me this morning, but a welcome to my dear daughter Susan, who dropped her family off at their church and just didn't want dad to be alone this morning. That's pretty nice, too.

Well, I keep looking for clocks at this place and there aren't any. Now, we started at, can you still hear me? Too bad for you. When does Mark come back? Next Sunday? Good.

I have a feeling that some good things are happening today, have already, and will happen. And I must say that I have a sense that there's somebody here who really needs the Lord. And I

have a tremendous desire, as all of the rest of you have, that that person or those individuals will find the Lord today and be able to go out of here and back to where you came from and say, you know what? I'm a Christian.

And I know it. I wasn't. And I am.

And I know it. And I'm glad. The title of my message, as you can see in the bulletin, see, I have taken away your sins.

And it's a direct quote from one of the verses from the third chapter of the book of Zechariah. And we read from Zechariah last Lord's Day. And I told you that a version that I've been using, that I used with students last year when we taught a Bible course, the New Living Translation, which I find very helpful in helping to read, especially the prophets, understandably.

And as I read through that third chapter, you will see the title actually coming from an angel. We've been talking about angels and good news from angels in the book of Zechariah. And this text coming from an angel of the Lord, bringing us some good news for today.

Zechariah, second last book of the Old Testament, chapter 3. Then the angel showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord. Satan was there at the angel's right hand, accusing Joshua of many things. And the Lord said to Satan, I, the Lord, reject your accusations, Satan.

Yes, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you. This man is like a burning stick that has been snatched from a fire. Joshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel.

So the angel said to the other standing there, take off his filthy clothes. And turning to Joshua, he said, see, I have taken away your sins. And now I'm giving you these fine new clothes.

Then I, that is Zechariah, then I said, please, could he also have a clean turban on his head? So they put a clean priestly turban on his head. They dressed him in new clothes, while the angel of the Lord stood by. Then the angel of the Lord spoke very solemnly to Joshua and said, this is what the Lord Almighty says.

If you follow my ways and obey my requirements, then you'll be given authority over my temple and its courtyards. I will let you walk in and out of my presence along with these others standing here. There were angels standing there.

Listen to me, Joshua, high priest, and all you other priests. You're symbols of the good things to come. Soon I'm going to bring my servant, the branch.

Now look at the jewel I've set before Joshua, a single stone with seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the Lord Almighty. And I will remove the sins of this land in a single day.

And on that day, says the Lord Almighty, each of you will invite your neighbor into your home to share your peace and prosperity. See, I have taken away your sins. Last week, we began to talk

about good news from the book of Zechariah.

Good news delivered to God's people by God's angels, angels bearing good news. Zechariah, we said, was the prophet of the restoration. He preached and ministered to God's people, to the Jewish people who returned to their homeland after being in captivity in Babylon for 70 years.

They came back miraculously to the land of promise, to the land of Judah. And they reestablished themselves in their own land. They had another chance, another opportunity to build for God.

And they rebuilt the cities, Jerusalem and other towns and villages. And they rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. And they rebuilt a nation that was able to be strong and firm and last through all kinds of historical onslaughts, right down to the time that that land was to welcome the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Came to that rebuilt city of Jerusalem and visited that rebuilt temple and cleansed it and made his way outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem and gave his life for the sins of the world. Zechariah was sent to these people, these people who were the people of the restoration, of the period of reestablishment. He was sent to encourage them.

He could have brought them messages of chastisement and sort of preached them into a sense of guilt, get the work done, build for God, build that temple. That wasn't his approach. He was led to encourage the people in their difficult task of building a nation again for God.

He encouraged them by bringing good news to them from God, good news about God being with them and helping them and building with them and strengthening them, good news that they had. God with them in all of their undertakings. And as Zechariah proceeds, we know that he has visions and in these visions he sees angels and it's the angels of God so often who are used to bring the good news of God to the people of God.

In chapter 1 of Zechariah, it's the good news that God has not forgotten his people. In spite of that long period of captivity and punishment, he hasn't forgotten them, he hasn't forsaken them, he hasn't abandoned them. He will again have mercy upon them.

How long, O Lord? How long, the angel prayed, before you again have mercy upon your people, O Lord? And the angel prayed that and the answer was given to the angel and the answer was, mercy is now. This will be the day of mercy for the people of God. God loves his people, says chapter 1. My love for Jerusalem and for Judah is passionate and strong and there's a great future in store for the people of God.

And if you are a Christian and you belong to the Lord, then you are part of this great body known as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, the church of the living God. We are the people of God and these promises are given to us. This good news that comes from the angels is for us and it's good news that says that in spite of all evidence to the contrary, God has not

forsaken or abandoned or forgotten us.

He loves us and his love for us is passionate and strong and he does have a future for us. And it's a bright and a glorious future that he has for us today. In chapter 2, more good news from the angels.

If chapter 1 says God loves his people, chapter 2 says God protects his people. Remember when Zechariah was prophesying, there was no Jerusalem. It had been destroyed.

There was no temple. It had been destroyed. There was no Bethlehem.

There was no Nazareth. There was no town for Jesus to be born in, no village for him to grow up in, no Jerusalem for him to come and preach the good news of the gospel of peace. And it was Zechariah's task and Haggai's task as prophets to say, build.

Build the towns. Build the cities. Build the temple.

Build for God. And so in chapter 2, Zechariah has a vision. And in this vision, he sees a man with a measuring rod.

And he's going to measure the future city of Jerusalem. How big does this, you know, a construction site and you see lots of people measuring. How big do the buildings have to be? How big does the property have to be? If we're building Jerusalem, how big do we need to make it? So he goes out with his measuring rod.

How big will this new city of Jerusalem be? But as he goes out and starts to get ready to do his measuring, an angel is sent to him. And the angel comes to him and says, stop. Don't even try.

Don't even try to measure Jerusalem. Because this city of Jerusalem is going to be so big, it's going to be such that you won't be able to measure it. There are going to be so many people in this city, now empty, so many people in this city that they're going to spill out over the walls and spill down into the valleys and up under the sides of the hills.

Jerusalem will be filled with people. And I think that means that the kingdom of God is going to spread and move and grow. And ultimately, how many people will be in the kingdom of our God and of his Christ? The book of Revelation says, I saw a great multitude which nobody could count.

Zechariah would never have been able to dream that. So a picture of what God is going to do in days to come. And that involves us.

We're part of that uncountable crowd. Well, if there's no wall around this Jerusalem, or at least people living outside the wall, how will they be protected? And the angel has some good news. And it's in chapter 2. And let's pick it up at verse 4. The other angel says, hurry, say to that young man, Jerusalem will someday be so full of people, it won't have room enough for everyone.

Many will live outside the city walls with all their livestock, yet they will be safe. For I myself will be a wall of fire around Jerusalem, says the Lord, and I will be the glory, the glory inside the city. A wall of fire around the people of God for protection.

God protects his people. Julie, in our prayer time last Sunday, where's Julie? Is she working? I imagine she'd be here if she wasn't. And she said, oh God, I pray that there'll be a hedge of angels around us protecting us today.

Good, beautiful prayer. But the angel says that God says that he'll be a wall of fire around his people to keep out anything that would destroy us ultimately. Jesus said, don't be so much afraid of the one who is able to kill the body, but be very much afraid of the one who can kill the body and the soul and cast them both into hell.

I've been a Christian for almost 50 years. And I've been in Christian work for over 40 years. And in all of that time, how many perils have there been? How many chances to fall off on the wrong side? How many opportunities to get off track, to be sidetracked? Ever so many.

And my own inclination is to make as many mistakes in life as can be made. And yet, I stand here before you today with my soul intact. How come? Dear Lord, thank you for that firewall of protection that has kept those things out that would have destroyed and consumed.

Jesus said, if you believe in him, you will not perish, but have everlasting life. And I haven't perished yet. And even when I die, I will not have perished, because there is around the life of every believer, there's around the building of every people of God, there's around the home of all of you who believe in Jesus, if you will believe it.

Wall of protection, a wall of fire, God himself protecting you. And if you'll believe it and celebrate it, in our midst is his glory. He protects us.

In chapter 4, the good news is that God empowers us and enables us. And we were introduced to Zerubbabel, say it again. Vacation Bible people, say Zerubbabel.

Bless you. It sounds like a wonderful vacation Bible school that you had. God empowers and enables his people.

That was the message for Zerubbabel, the governor, the prince of Judah, who led the people out of captivity back into Judah. And he was given the task, among other great tasks, of building the temple. How could he accomplish that great task? How do you build the kingdom of God? How do you start from scratch with nothing but your own ingenuity and you say that's not enough? Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

What seems to us utterly impossible, God says my spirit will empower, enable, and enable. And when we come up against obstacles that seem absolutely insurmountable in our personal lives, and we're faced with mountains, we say, Lord, I can't. He says, by my spirit, you can.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And how does he strengthen me? By the empowerment of his blessed Holy Spirit, the water of life springing up, said Jesus, into eternal life. In chapter 3, we read it, more good news.

God defends his people. He defends them from all of Satan's accusations. Make it personal.

He defends us from Satan's accusations. Hear it again. Satan was there at the angel's right hand, accusing Joshua of many things.

It looks like a courtroom scene, and it is. Joshua is the high priest. We're introduced to Joshua.

The rabble was the governor, Joshua, the high priest of this new experiment, this experiment at restoration and reestablishment of the kingdom. And he's the priest. He's the one who would pray for God's people, minister to God's people, represent God to the people.

And he's on trial as this vision of chapter 3 begins. The prosecutor is Satan. And the counsel for the defense? Well, the angel of the Lord.

Well, the Lord himself. Is that a dream team? I think so. Satan is accusing Joshua of many things.

His clothes are filthy. His priestly garments, filthy, symbolizing his and the people's sins. And of course, he's unable to function as a priest in these horrible garments.

And Satan is there accusing him. I know where that spot came from. I can tell you where this filth came from.

I can tell you how these garments became that dirty. And of course, reminding Joshua, reminding God, as if he needed to be reminded, of the sins of this priest. What might some of those sins have been? Well, over in 2 Chronicles 36, we read about the final state of Israel before the captivity.

Maybe this is what the Lord had in mind when he talks about these filthy garments. Zedekiah, the king, also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He stiffened his neck.

He hardened his heart against turning to the Lord. All the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful. They followed all the abominations of the nations.

They polluted the house of the Lord God. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising God's words, scoffing at his prophets.

I wonder if all of that was covering the garments of this priest who represented the people and himself. Scoffing at the prophets till the wrath of God against his people became so great that there was no remedy. So here he stands before the Lord, before the angels, before Satan, and

before us.

And he's a shameful sight. And Satan is right there to accuse. But what does the Lord do? The Lord resists the accusations of Satan.

The Lord defends his servants. Satan was there at the angel's right hand accusing Joshua. And the Lord said to Satan, I'm reading this for the third time, I, the Lord, reject your accusation, Satan.

Yes, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you. This man is like a burning stick who's been snatched from the fire. I know all about Joshua, the Lord said.

I don't need Satan to tell me about all the things that have brought guilt to the people of God. I take them all seriously. And I have in mind what I'm going to do about all of this filth on the garments of this man, Joshua.

But I want to tell you something, Satan. This is my child. This man is like a stick who is pulled out of the fire, out of the fire of Babylonian persecution, out of the fire of Babylonian captivity, out of the fire of oppression and suppression.

Joshua has been delivered, just like you pull a stick out of the fireplace and perhaps big enough that you could use it again for a useful purpose before it's absolutely destroyed. John Wesley, when he was six years old, little boy sleeping in the upstairs bedroom of the Epworth Parsonage in England, his father a minister, and a fire broke out in the parsonage. And ultimately, the building was completely destroyed.

And there's a painting from that age. And there's the house, and there are the flames, and there's the upstairs window, and there's a little face peering out. And it's John Wesley, just a little boy.

And some of the neighbors gather around, and a few of them form a human ladder. And they make their way up to that window, and they rescue John Wesley from the flames just in time. Because then the roof caved in, and ultimately, the building burned to the ground.

Well, it was a big family. There were eight children in that family. And they were all saved.

And Samuel Wesley gathered his family around them. Some of them were still concerned to try to put out the rest of the fire, but it was far too late. And Samuel Wesley said, come neighbors, let's kneel down.

Let's give thanks to God. He's given me all my eight children. Let the house go.

I am rich enough. John Wesley never forgot that event of being rescued from that burning house. And he borrowed from Zechariah and borrowed from Amos, and always referred to himself as a stick pulled out of the fire, or as the King James has it, a brand plucked from the burning.

Literally, saved from that burning house. And figuratively and spiritually saved from lostness and from the burning of worldliness and from the heat of destruction. And he always believed he was saved for a purpose, and that he had a destiny to be God's man wherever he was and whatever he was doing.

And so Joshua is called a stick saved from the fire. He belongs to me, said the Lord, Satan. And I'm not listening to your accusations against him.

Satan, be still. Satan, be gone. Satan, back off.

Does he come to you with his accusations and remind you of your sins and remind you of your shortcomings and remind you of your weaknesses so that you become smaller and smaller in your own eyes and you feel, I'm good for nothing, good to nobody, much less good to God? God says, I rebuke you, Satan. God doesn't want you to listen to Satan. God knows about all of your weaknesses and sins.

But God has a plan to deal with them. And what's his plan? Well, Satan's plan, of course, is to condemn you. That's what he wants to happen.

He wants a verdict of guilty rendered in this courtroom. He wants you sentenced and condemned. He wants to render us ineffective and useless, useless to God, useless in our own eyes, and unable to be a blessing to anybody.

But God has other plans for Joshua. His purpose isn't to condemn but to save him. God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

God takes Joshua's sins seriously. He will deal with them in his way. And here in this chapter and in this vision, he uses the angels to work out his purposes.

What do they do? Why, they take off those filthy garments and they replace them with new and clean priestly robes. Listen to the angel speak for the Lord now. See, says the Lord to the angel, see, holding up all of that dirty laundry.

See, I have taken away your sins. And I am giving you these fine new garments. What a picture of what happens when a person comes to Christ.

And there's a little humor here because in verse 5, Zachariah said, then I said, please, could he also have a clean turban on his head? The angels seem to have forgotten the complete priestly uniform. And it's not complete without this turban. So he's going to be completely ready to be a man of God, a priest of God, a servant of God.

And he's given his crown. And what's it say on the priest's crown? Holy to the Lord. Now he's ready.

He's ready to be the high priest of the restoration. He's ready to go into the very presence of God where the angels are. And then he's ready to go out among the people and bless them

because he brings the blessing of God to them.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. See, I've taken away your sin. Where did he take them? Where did they go? Where did those filthy garments go? Well, somebody else is introduced in this chapter.

And that somebody is called the branch, the servant, verse 8. Soon I'm going to bring my servant, the branch. Those are names of Jesus throughout the prophets. He's the stone.

And what a wonderful verse is chapter 9. I will remove the sins of this land once the branch comes, once the servant comes. I'll remove the sins of this land in a single day. What day? What day were the sins of the land removed all at once? Was it that Calvary day? Was it that Golgotha day? Was it that horrible Good Friday when the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all? See, I have taken away your sin.

And I have given you these new fine clothes, fit for service so that you can go in and out with God, fit to be a blessing to people in the name of God. The next time you come to communion and you hold the cup in your hand, you hold the bread in your hand, look down and just say to yourself, see, hear the Lord speak. See, I've taken away your sins.

See, I have taken away your sins. And I've given you these fine new clothes. It became sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Good news, and all from angels, all really from the Lord, of course, the source of all good news, through His angels. He loves us passionately and strongly. He protects us, if we'll believe it, as with a wall of fire and His glory in the middle of it.

He empowers us and enables us by nothing less than His own Spirit who dwells within us. And He defends us from all of Satan's accusations and attacks because He wants to cleanse us and clothe us and crown us and fit us for service, service to God and blessing to everybody around us, all our lives. Good news? Let's believe it.

Let's revel in it. Let's celebrate it. Let's pray.

Paul said, What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can be against us? Since God didn't spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't God who gave us Christ also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen?