

Rev. Dan Welch Wed. in Lent 2 3-3-21 Text: Zechariah 3:1-10

“Who Will Take the Garbage Out?”

[Garbage Cans Slide] Who will take the garbage out? Has that question ever been asked in your family? It doesn't get asked much in mine. Everyone knows that in our house it's Dad's job. That's not to say surprises don't happen and someone else may do it in a pinch. But being born with a weak, to almost non-existent, sense of smell kind of makes me the natural choice to take the garbage out. Please don't misunderstand, I'm not complaining. I'm just stating facts as facts as they relate to today's text from Zechariah: “Who will take the garbage out?”

[Your Kingdom Come Slide] Our sermon series theme from Zechariah is “Your kingdom come.” And today we see that when God's kingdom *comes* the garbage definitely goes *out*. That's what Zechariah teaches in 5:6–11. ***When God's kingdom comes the garbage goes out.*** And if the garbage doesn't go out, then what happens? Life stinks! Let's take a look.

[Skunk Slide] I once heard about a woman in Michigan who had a skunk in her cellar. She called the police who said to open the cellar door,

make a trail of breadcrumbs from the cellar to the backyard, then wait for the skunk to follow the crumbs. The next day the woman called the police and said, “Guess what? Instead of one skunk, now I have two skunks in my cellar!”

[Overflowing Garbage Can Slide] It’s true. Sometimes life stinks. In many ways life has been very stinky for just about a whole year now because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social Distancing. Schools and churches closing or being socially distanced. Sports, recreation, and so many other activities put on hold or at least having a damper put on them. Thanks be to God that it’s not a year ago when we were about to enter into a National State of Emergency. I remember how shopping at grocery stores became like a zoo with so many people hoarding hand sanitizer, wet wipes, and of course packages of toilet paper!

There’s a big difference between prudence and paranoia. Prudence washes our hands. Paranoia is overwhelmed with it all. Prudence makes sure we do all we can to keep everyone safe. Paranoia stockpiles and hoards it all. Prudence trusts Jesus. Paranoia trusts self.

The goal of this sermon is to move us from paranoia to prudence; from dread and high anxiety to a greater and more robust trust and confidence in our God; from fear to faith because fear has been so widespread this past year throughout over our land. Who will take *this* garbage out?

[“Storks” with Basket Slide] *God will.* In Zechariah’s seventh vision he appoints two women who have wings like storks—yes *storks*. They lift up a basket, think of it as a garbage can, and take it to the land of Shinar—an ancient name for Babylon. But, we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

[Basket Slide] The vision begins with the LORD’s Messenger showing Zechariah a basket. Zechariah raises his eyes and sees a lead lid lifted up, and surprise, there’s a woman sitting inside the basket! Just then, the woman called Wickedness tries to get out so the Messenger throws her back and slams the lead lid shut.

Wickedness is always trying to get out and run loose—as fast as it can. The Messenger, though, pushes Wickedness back into the garbage

can. The LORD's Messenger shows his authority and power. The LORD's Messenger prevails!

[“Storks” with Basket Slide again] After that, the stork-like-women take the basket/garbage can with Wickedness in it to Shinar—or Babylon. “Operation Removal” is complete! Wickedness has been removed. Ok, my guess is that by this point you might have a question... or three.

[Messenger, Wickedness, Meaning Slide] Let's begin with this. “Who is the Messenger?” He is “the LORD's Messenger,” the pre-incarnate Christ. What in the world is the “pre-incarnate Christ?” Good question. Before taking on flesh, that is the incarnation, Jesus is present throughout the Old Testament—especially in the form of the LORD's Messenger. Note well, the Messenger has complete authority over Wickedness. Wickedness tries to get out of the basket but the Messenger slams the lead lid shut.

“Ok, so who's the woman stuck in the flying garbage can?” Zechariah calls her “Wickedness” and wickedness stands for fear, panic, and the despair that all is lost.

“What does the vision mean?” Fear is placed in the basket and lifted up by storks—known for their strength and ability to fly long distances. God returns fear to the land of Shinar/Babylon. With all of this, Zechariah says that—in very vivid detail—God takes the garbage out.

[Garbage Cans Slide] Fear, finally, is what fills life with despair and makes it stink. That’s why garbage is a good way to describe fear. When I took my first call out of the seminary in St. Louis, we moved to Meadow Grove, Nebraska. How did we move? First class! We got a U-Haul Rental Truck! And this U-Haul Rental Truck had a maximum speed limit of 55. And for me, 55 miles per hour is about half my speed! What’s more, my parents were driving behind me in their car and my Dad was always very conscientious of following the speed limits, so I knew I didn’t want to risk going over the maximum allowable speed of that big truck. I thought we’d never get out of Missouri—what misery! Fear is a lot like that speed limit I had to follow. It keeps us from going where God wants us to go. Fear keeps us from faith.

Have you ever noticed just how much we obsess over two words, “What if?” “What if I fail?” “What if I don’t have enough money?” What if my life ends up being one disappointment after another? What if? What if? What if? And so, our lives putt along at half speed!

Who will take *our* garbage out, **all** of it? Who will deliver us from the despair fear brings into our lives? **God** will, through His means of grace, which in Zechariah’s case are pictured as stork-like-women.

[Scapegoat slide] Long before Zechariah’s vision, it was in God’s heart to take away everything that’s rotten and rancid—everything that makes life stink. It’s called the Day of Atonement. The high priest confessed Israel’s sins upon the scapegoat, which could just as easily be called “the garbage-goat” who was then cast into the wilderness. Psalm 103:12, “God removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west!”

[Demon-Possessed Pigs Slide] Standing in this same tradition, Jesus once met a demon-possessed man whose name was Legion. Jesus sends his demons into pigs who rush headlong into the Sea of Galilee. One day

Jesus will throw all the garbage—the devil, the false prophet and the beast as talked about in the book of Revelation—into the lake of fire and slam the lead lid shut. But, we’re getting ahead of ourselves—again.

[Golgotha Slide] Jesus Christ—the LORD’s Messenger in Zechariah’s book—stepped out of the visions and into the garbage. Golgotha was filled with rotting flesh and the stench of death. Corpses hung there for days, sometimes weeks, often consumed by birds and animals.

1 John 4:18, “Perfect love casts out fear.” You are perfectly loved. You are perfectly loved by God. Perfect love forgives your past. No need to fear that. Perfect love is directing you today. No need to fear that. And perfect love has secured your future-forever-with God! Definitely no need to fear that!

[Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Slide] Shel Silverstein famously writes, “Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout would not take the garbage out! She’d scour the pots and scrape the pans, candy the yams and spice the hams. And though her daddy would scream and shout, she would not take the garbage out. It piled up to the ceiling: coffee grounds and potato peelings;

brown bananas, rotten peas, and chunks of sour cottage cheese. It filled the can, it covered the floor, it cracked the window, it blocked the door. With bacon rinds and chicken bones, drippy ends of ice cream cones. The garbage rolled down the hall, it raised the roof, it broke the wall. And finally Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout said, *'OK, I'll take the garbage out!'* But then, of course, it was too late, the garbage reached across the state, from New York City to the Golden Gate.”

[Jesus on Cross Slide] But, we're getting ahead of ourselves—again! Oh, yes, someday it will be too late, but not for us, not here, not now. Zechariah's basket, Messenger, Wickedness, lead lid and stork-like-women point us to the only solution when anything fills us with deep despair. Jesus Christ, God's Son takes the garbage of fear out. Free of charge. Every single time. All for you. Amen.