

SNATCHED FROM THE FIRE

Wednesday, August 5

Reading: Zechariah 3-4

Zechariah 3:1 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. **2** 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?" **3** Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. **4** 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."

On December 7, 1941, Mitsua Fuchida was the commander of the Japanese squadrons that bombed Pearl Harbor killing more than 2300 Americans. After the war, Fuchida returned home discouraged and bitter from Japan's defeat. His life was miserable. One day in October 1948 on a visit to Tokyo, he saw an American handing out leaflets entitled "I Was a Prisoner of Japan." The American's name was Jacob DeShazer and he had been captured and held in a Japanese prison camp for 40 months during the war. The leaflet described how Jacob overcame his hatred for his captors through the love of Christ.

Mitsua Fuchida was stunned by DeShazer's story. A few days later, he bought a Bible and began to read about Jesus. The words of Luke 23:34 stuck with this Japanese pilot: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Fuchida realized that he was one of those for whom Jesus had prayed and accepted Christ as his Savior. For the next 28 years until his death in 1976, this man became an evangelist in Japan and Asia and became good friends with his former enemy Jacob DeShazer. God's grace reached down and forgave this leader of one of the most horrendous massacres in America's history.¹

The grace of God has no bounds. Zechariah contains a series of sometimes confusing visions God revealed to His prophet. In chapter 3, we see the high priest Joshua standing before God in dirty clothes being accused by Satan. He represents the nation of Israel who had been in exile because of their sin. Now they have returned to Jerusalem but they still bear the stains of their former disobedience. But Satan has no claim on God's people. He is rebuked for his accusations as Joshua is given clean clothes by God - a symbol of God's forgiveness. God calls him "a burning stick snatched from the fire."

Like Joshua and Mitsua Fuchida, we are all burning sticks snatched from the fire. None of us deserve God's forgiveness and there is nothing we can do to put out the fire of judgment that we all deserve. But God provided the answer! Zechariah calls Him "the Branch" and "the stone with seven eyes." God promised he would "remove the sin...in a single day" (3:9). This is what happened at the cross. Jesus Christ, the Branch took the fire of God's judgment for us so that we might become "sticks snatched from the fire."

Have you thanked Christ for his grace and forgiveness? Are you involved in the work of snatching other "sticks" out of the fires of Hell?

¹ Stephen R. Miller. Nahum-Malachi (Holman Old Testament Commentary series), Zechariah 3 introduction