

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

TEXT: ZECHARIAH 5:6-11

THEME: TAKING THE GARBAGE OUT

5 Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, "Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out." **6** And I said, "What is it?" He said, "This is the basket that is going out." And he said, "This is their iniquity in all the land." **7** And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! **8** And he said, "This is Wickedness." And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening. **9** Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, two women coming forward! The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. **10** Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they taking the basket?" **11** He said to me, "To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base."

In the name of Jesus:

Each and every Monday morning I have a job to do. I take the garbage out. All of the stuff that is to be thrown away, all of the junk and rubbish that has been accumulated for the past week is hauled out to the side of the street, there to await its fate with the sanitation engineers of Lancaster Ohio.

Some cities in our country wish that they had it so good. I read recently that garbage is piling up on the streets of many cities on our East Coast, New York and Philadelphia to name a couple. The reason is, of course, the

Pandemic. Some workers are calling in sick because they have the virus. Others are afraid of going to work, thinking that they might catch the virus. The garbage is being taken out. No one, though, is there to haul it away.

The theme of our sermon series on Zechariah is “Your Kingdom Comes.” When God’s Kingdom comes, the garbage goes out, and if the garbage doesn’t go out? Then life stinks!

I once heard about a woman in Michigan who had a skunk in her cellar. She called the police and they told her to open the cellar door, make a trail of breadcrumbs from the cellar to the back yard, then wait for the skunk to follow the crumbs. She followed the instructions to the letter. She called the next day to complain. She said to the police that she did what she was told, but now, instead of having one skunk in the cellar, she now has two!

Let’s be honest, life right now stinks. It stinks because of Covid-19, it stinks because of masks, social distancing, the cancelling of vacations. Our society seesaws between prudence and paranoia. Prudence washes our hands and wears a mask. Paranoia runs to the store to hoard toilet paper. Prudence trusts Jesus. Paranoia trusts self.

We need to move from paranoia to prudence; from living in and cowering in a state of dread and anxiety to a greater and more robust

confidence in the Lord. We need to move from fear to faith, from hate to love, because hate and fear are taking over our land. Who is going to take ***this garbage out?***

God will. In Zechariah's seventh vision, he appoints two women who have wings like storks. They lift up a basket, think of it as a garbage can, and take it to the land of Shinar, which is an ancient name for Babylon, where the people of God have been exiled for 70 years before they returned to Jerusalem.

The vision begins with the Angel of the Lord, remember, that is Jesus, showing Zechariah a basket. Zechariah looks up and sees a lead lid lifted up, and there is a woman sitting in the basket. The woman, who is called Wickedness, tries to get out so Jesus throws her back in and slams the lead lid shut.

Wickedness is always trying to get out and run loose, as fast as it can. Jesus, though, pushes Wickedness out and puts Wickedness back where it belongs, in the garbage can. Jesus has the authority and power to do this, because He is stronger than Wickedness. He is good, gracious, and hold. Wickedness has been removed. All an account of Jesus! And when Wickedness tries to get out of the garbage can and rear her ugly head, Jesus slams the lead lid shut.

After that, the stork-like-women take the basket/garbage can with Wickedness in it to Shinar—and so, what does this mean? Wickedness and fear is placed in the basket and lifted up by storks. Storks are birds known for their strength and their ability to fly long distances. God returns the fear and wickedness of the land, Shinar/Babylon, with all of its idolatry and sinfulness, back to where it came from. And in all of this, Zechariah says that, in very vivid detail, that God takes the garbage out.

Fear is a lack of trust in God. Fear fills our lives with despair and makes it stink. Garbage is a good way to describe fear. Fear paralyzes us. Fear keeps us from going where God wants us to go. Fear keeps us from faith. And fear keeps us from having God's kingdom come to us.

When we fear we obsess over two little words: "What if?" "What if....I fail? What if.... I don't have enough money? What if.... I get sick? What if....this doesn't turn out the way I want it to? And so we live in a world of what ifs, paralyzed by fear, unable to move forward in faith. Who will take **this** garbage out? God does, by His Word, by washing our sins away in Baptism, by cleansing us when we partake the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Supper.

Many years ago, before the time of Zechariah, the Lord instructed Moses to celebrate a Day of Atonement. It is called Yom Kippur. On that day, the nation of Israel would take a goat, this goat would be called a scapegoat. All of the sins of the people, committed during the past year, would be confessed and placed on the head of this goat, and the goat would become the garbage goat and be led off into the wilderness, never to return, to signify that the Lord forgives and removes sin, for God removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west.

On a Friday, on a hill called Golgotha, over 2000 years ago, another Lamb became the Scapegoat or Garbage Goat. Golgotha was a place where the people took their garbage, it was a place of broken pottery, discarded rocks, and rotting flesh. To look at Golgotha from a distance, you could see the head of a skeleton in the rock formation of this God forsaken place. So on that Friday that we call Good, God took all of our sins, our fears, the garbage from our lives, and placed it on His Son, Jesus. He who knew no sin became sin for us. All so that you and I might live in the light of God's love. God tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. And you are perfectly loved. You are perfectly loved by God. His perfect love for you in Jesus forgives you your sins, so there is no need to fear that. And His perfect love is with you now and

always, so no need to live in fear or wallow in misery and despair. No matter who you are, in Jesus God will never leave you or forsake you, you don't need to live be afraid, for God is with you and blesses you with His love.

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."

One day it will be too late to take the garbage out, but that day isn't today! When the problems of life seem ready to overtake you, Jesus tells you don't be afraid. For He, Jesus, has taken the garbage out. Free of charge, Every single time. For you. Amen