

“The Jesus Music”

God at the Movies 2022: Pt.5

[Trailer 2:31]

I want to start off with a word association exercise this morning. As you think about the three pillars that – stereotypically or not – propped up much of the youth counterculture from the late 1960’s onward, the warnings of politicians, parents, pastors and moralists of all stripes was; sex, drugs *and*...what else is there? rock n’ roll! The devil’s beat!

Our film selection today tells the story – and tells it very well in my opinion – of how one of the most powerful forms of American music came to be co-opted by the church – well, *most* of the church at least. Some still view the term “Christian rock” as oxymoronic as “Islamic comedy”, but for many millions of Christians in the United States, Christian rock – more commonly known as “Contemporary Christian Music” or CCM – has become the default music of worship.

I mean look around you; did you hear an organ and a choir singing this morning? No, you heard guitars, synthesizers and drums. Band driven worship is now the standard in any church that hopes to reach a younger audience – who are we kidding, the Baby Boomers who grew up on rock are an older audience now and they don’t want to go back either.

And while the CCM industry has made a turn toward predominantly worship music in recent years, starting in the 70’s and blossoming in the 80’s and 90’s, you can find just about any and every genre of popular music baptized into a message that litters the familiar sound with perhaps unexpected lyrics like, “Jesus”, “Lord” and “praise”. Turn the radio dial and you kind find CCM in any market. As an industry it now outsells classical and jazz music combined. And make no mistake, it *is* an industry. The melding of Charisma and capitalism is a uniquely American story – for good and for bad.

Now, before I can talk about today’s film – a documentary by the way; we’ve had all kinds of genres in this year’s series, historical biopics, animations, musicals, action adventure and now a documentary. But before I can get into it, I need to tell you some of my backstory so that you can understand why I would pick this movie for our series. It’s very personal for me. Two weeks ago Anika and I went to a big record convention at the Palmer Event Center and when I saw this, there was no question that it would be coming home with me. To understand why, I have to tell you a story.

Growing up in a Christian home – not just Christian, but conservative Pentecostal evangelical – I was not allowed to listen to rock n’ roll music. I was not allowed to do a number of things that were considered “worldly”. Much freer than my parents generation – at least I could go roller skating and see select movies. But rock n’ roll was clearly the pathway to apostasy. I have a cousin who was a child of the 60’s and she was much freer in her musical expression.

As a preteen I remember going to her house once and making two bootleg cassette tapes with one of her record albums on each side – Bruce Springsteen’s *Born in the USA*, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*, *An Innocent Man* by Billy Joel and Madonna’s *Like a Virgin*. Dangerous stuff, I know! But I kept those tapes hidden like contraband in a prison. I would listen to them on a little Walkman with foam headphones.

The only music allowed in my parent’s house – and to this day it’s the only music you will hear at 8300 Cardinal Lane, North Richland Hills Texas, is southern gospel quartet music. By the way, the “southern” part of the name distinguishes it from regular “gospel music” which means that it is *white*. I’m not even going to talk about the racial issues in CCM music this morning, but they are there and I think the movie does a good job of addressing them. But in case you are not familiar with southern gospel quartet music, let me give you a quick listen. [**Stamps :12**]

Now, that was *fun* music in my parents generation. They would drive across the country to “gospel singin’s” the way any young person flocks to ACL Fest today. But I hated it. And while I appreciate the musicality and even the Spirit presented...(lean in close in case my mother is listening) I *still* hate it. And the sad thing is, I know it’s a psychological reaction because it was so exclusively forced on me growing up. I’m like the guy from *A Clockwork Orange* who has to throw up whenever he hears Beethoven’s 9th symphony!

Now some of you are looking at me with bewilderment. You simply can’t understand why rock music – “Even soft rock?” Yes, even soft rock – was so strictly forbidden. My kids don’t even get it. But that’s because they, like many of you, were not raised in a fundamentalist culture. But *some* of you understand. Now what is a fundamentalist? One of my favorite church historians, George Marsden, famously said, “A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.”

Strictly speaking, theological fundamentalism has to do with how you view the Bible and believing in a literal resurrection and things like that. But there is certainly a cultural element as well. Founder of the Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell, Sr. – who we met in the Tammy Faye movie earlier – says, “My definition of a fundamentalist, is one who, first, believes in the inerrancy of scripture, and second, is committed to a **biblical separation in the world** and to the Lordship of Christ... I mean separation from rock music, separation from immorality, separation from Hollywood culture.”

When religious conservatives talk about “worldliness”, they are very concerned with scriptures that you find all over the Old Testament about separation from non-believers. Some that are even quoted in the New Testament as when Paul mentions a passage from the prophet Isaiah in **2 Corinthians 6:17**, “*Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”*” So something can be off limits – not just because it’s harmful like drunkenness or adultery – but just because it doesn’t *seem* to be Christian, like...roller skates, I guess?

I mean, maybe you could go to see a “good” movie in a theatre and if the rapture happened when you were in there, *maybe* God would be merciful and take you up anyway...but why risk it? Better to “touch no unclean thing”. Of course, what is considered unclean in fundamentalist circles is always changing from generation to generation. But rock music has been a pretty constant theme since Elvis shook his pelvis.

But Christians – and not just in America, I mean through all of church history – have been masterful at talking things from “the world” and making them “Christian”. It’s absolutely true that December 25th and decorating pine trees in your home originally belonged to pagan druids. But centuries later, that’s Jesus’ birthday party, thank you very much!

And the same thing has been true of music. Even the great reformer Martin Luther – there’s not a hardcore fundamentalist who wouldn’t sing his *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* – well, he took that and several other melodies from popular tavern songs of his day and changed the words to befit church worship. The same thing began to happen in 1970’s America, except instead of monks, they were hippies. “The Jesus People” who had become disillusioned with the 60’s empty promises and got turned on to Jesus. They took their style of music and just made the words about newfound savior.

So you can imagine what it must have been like for young Anthony, circa 1985, to go to a Royal Rangers leadership training camp – my denomination had it’s own version of Boy Scouts, so we could make sure even that culture didn’t get too “worldly” – and I heard one of the older boys *brazenly* blaring a jungle beat from a boom box. “Shhh, they gonna find you!” But it was ok, he was listening to Rez Band and Petra.

And that’s the first time I was exposed to Christian rock n’ roll. It was like literal scales fell from my eyes – or at least my *ears* – the sun seemed warmer on my face, shadows disappeared in the glow of a bright light, everything was clean and good and new. You’ll remember the the music of my parents? Now compare that to *this*...**[Petra :20]**.

I remember saying, “Wait, this is *Christian*? My parents *have* to let me listen to this?” I went home and immediately went to Joshua’s Christian Bookstore where I purchased the cassette tape of Petra’s *Beat the System*. I still have it, along with a CD, and now some vintage vinyl.

I even saw them in concert at Six Flags, hanging onto the front rail with the giant speakers reverberating in my *soul*. Beginning a process that would culminate today with me being unable to understand what Deanna is saying to me when I’m running water in the sink! Ah sweet, rock and roll! *Christian* rock n’ roll – CCM – with a beat that made me feel cool and message that made me feel Christlike. Soon I had dozens of CCM cassettes, later to be replaced by CD’s. But it was a lifeline to me through junior high and into early high school.

But not everyone was as happy as I was. A decade before I had embraced it, the original Jesus Music was viewed with suspicion – if not outright disgust – by many in the establishment church world. Let me play you a clip from the film that address it...and a perhaps surprising source of breakthrough. **[Billy Graham 1:47]**. Thank God for Billy Graham! He really was an important bridge between the church and culture in many ways. Perhaps the most influential American Christian over the last 80 years.

But not everyone was convinced. There was still a good deal of controversy around CCM in many church circles – my own not withstanding. There was always a Pavlovian reaction to anything that “looked secular”. I mentioned during the Tammy Faye message a few weeks ago that I grew up – and still am – a part of the Assemblies of God denomination. And that, in the 1980’s the two biggest names we had were television preachers – Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart.

Well, Louisiana based Jimmy Swaggart was a big influence in my Ft. Worth church. And his preaching always contained a healthy amount of railing against “the things of this world”. If it was fun, it was probably sin. He was especially hard on rock n’ roll, because as he repeatedly said, his cousin Jerry Lee Lewis, and his friend Elvis, created it. A little white bias there, but he’s not far off.

I like how one historian of Christian music described it, “The well-known Pentecostal television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart spent a great deal of time and energy on that theme of purity. Long before Swaggart would suffer public humiliation from a sex scandal involving a prostitute, he used his pulpit to oppose the wickedness of rock ‘n’ roll.” (*The Devil’s Music*, Stephens, 217)

I'm not a big fan of hypocrisy. But for Pastor Jimmy, "sanctified rock n' roll" was still rock n' roll as far as he was concerned and he was against it. Never mind, that his own singing albums sounded a lot more like my parents music. No, no, this wasn't about protecting his record sales from the upstart – and more popular – youngsters, this was about *holiness*, I tell you!

In 1987, Swaggart wrote a book called *Religious Rock n Roll: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* and my own youth pastor became a big fan. I can still recall the horror I felt during the Wednesday night youth service when he preached *against* my music. I was enraged. You guys are lucky I'm still a Christian today. Ironically, that youth pastor *isn't*. He's an atheist now and I sometimes wonder if God withdrew from him because he slandered *The Altar Boys*. That's just a *joke* – I love him very much and regularly pray for him to return to the fold. I actually think he would like our church a lot.

Swaggart wouldn't have his massive fall until 1988, so he still had great influence in our denomination when that book was released, which probably explains why at the 1987 Assemblies of God General Council – every odd year they have a massive national gathering of ministers, that I now attend – but in the

minutes you will find a resolution on "Christian Music Artists" that reads:

"WHEREAS, The Church of Jesus Christ has come under special attack from Satan through the entertainment media and has been provoked to emulate the world in its degraded art forms; therefore be it RESOLVED, That the 1987 General Council in session express concern and disapproval of certain Christian artists whose appearance and stage performances contradict in form, substance, and spirit, that for which the Pentecostal Movement stands."

Now, that could have been trouble for young Anthony, but it wasn't, and I'll tell you why. That resolution took place in August and in October, I turned 16. Which meant I had a car...which meant I could listen to whatever the heck I wanted to! I also was gainfully employed at the Wal-Mart on weekends, so I had my own shekels as well. And I used my new found freedom to begin to listen to *real* rock n' roll music. Ironically, in the CCM world I had always gravitated to the alternative sound so I just started listening to The Cure and The Smiths and REM, you know, the new-wave bands the Christian ones were *trying to sound like*.

So I was suddenly free to listen to a wide variety of music – and I still do. And by the way, I’ve never had a drink of alcohol, never done drugs, was a virgin on my wedding night and managed to get called to be a preacher while attending one of the most liberal universities in the country. So I guess I somehow managed to survive the devil’s music.

But I’ve always been interested in how Christian faith interacts with non-Christian culture. My parents may have tried to keep me “from the world” but at the same time they raised me “in the world”. I went to public schools and engaged in most pop culture except rock music and Dungeons and Dragons – that’s another sermon! But – and I think *God at the Movies* is the fruit of this – I’ve always been interested in “Christ the transformer of culture” rather than “Christ against culture” to borrow a phrase from Richard Niebuhr.

I’m fascinated for instance by the conversion of Bob Dylan in 1978 to Christianity - born-again Christianity. He was one of the biggest rock stars in the world and he abandoned it to put out three straight albums of nothing but Jesus music – and they are amazing albums by the way. His *Slow Train Coming* album landed him his first Grammy for Male Rock Vocal for the song, “Gotta Serve Somebody” – as direct a call to Biblical repentance as you will find. It also won the Dove Award for Best Inspirational Album – that’s the CCM version of the Grammys.

That same year, 1979, Bob appeared on *Saturday Night Live* – alongside Monty’s Python’s Eric Idle, who was promoting a scandalous satirical movie based on the life of Christ! – and Bob unabashedly sang three Christian songs from his album. A crystal clear witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ on one of the most influential stages of secular entertainment. And people *hated* him for it.

CCM legendary pioneer Larry Norman talks about Bob Dylan’s *Slow Train Coming* tour, “Christians were so rude to him. They would yell at him from the audience. He sings all gospel music, but he sings two songs that he wrote before. They’re actually about his Jewish quest to see God. But all the Christians know is, that’s not on his record! So they’re booing him for singing a song that wasn’t about Jesus when it was totally germane. And then he was getting it from the non-Christians. They were booing him and yelling out, play “Lay, Lady Lay”, play “Everybody Must Get Stoned.” He just couldn’t get any breathing room.” (*No Sympathy for the Devil*, 230)

Crucified between the Temple and the Empire. That may be one of the most Christlike thing I’ve ever heard! Dylan still professes to be a Christian, but after the treatment he received he’s by all accounts turned his back on the organized church. It’s very sad the way we can treat people who don’t live up to our holiness standard.

In CCM, maybe nobody has had it worse than Amy Grant. In fact, that AG General Council debate in 1987 mentioned her by name as one of the problematic. She didn't come out of the rock world, Amy started singing sweet innocent Jesus songs in her church at the age of 16. She became the queen of the CCM prom. And in the 80's her pop sound began to have crossover success. I remember vividly the night one of her songs made it on an episode of *Miami Vice* – there was no streaming back then, kids – so there I sat on a Friday night watching it drop on a square television with a bunch of youth group friends. We were thrilled. It was like *we* had arrived.

But of course rather than celebrating - just like with Dylan and SNL - many Christians saw her very *platform* as a sign that she was getting “too worldly.” Selling out. And then when her song “Baby Baby” topped the Billboard Hot 100 for two consecutive weeks in April 1991, you would have thought she personally ushered in the Antichrist. The things they said about her were just awful. And so when she actually got divorced and remarried a few years later...wow, she was treated so badly. I think the movie presents this well, let's watch a clip...**[Judgmental 1:17]**

Why do we do this? Why are Christians – who sing about being redeemed by *Amazing Grace* – more judgmental of people who struggle or stumble? Why do we cannibalize our own? For that matter, why are we so critical of “the world” – when the Bible says that God

so *loved* the world that He sent His only Son to save it? In fact, why is there such a thing as “Christian” music at all? Why do we have separate industries in America for everything from music to movies to clothing to wall art? And most of it vastly inferior aesthetically to it's secular counterpart!

And by the way, if you *like* this stuff – good for you – my point is not to say you shouldn't read Christian fiction or wear “God's Gym” t-shirts as a witness conversation starter. But I am concerned with a belief system that says, that's the *only* – or even that's the *appropriate* – avenue for a serious Christian. That's simply not true and it leads to a lot of the judgmental attitudes that we are talking about. I think it actually hampers the work that Jesus has called us to do. And I think it comes from some bad theology.

And part of my job as a pastor is to help you develop good theology – *theo-logos*, “words about God.” So I think the reason we even have CCM – not church worship music I mean, but an alternative Christian form of entertainment – stems from a fundamental misunderstanding that you find in many holiness traditions – like my own. In fact, many, many people that I know that have left the Assemblies of God over the years – family members even – have done so because they've come to reject this flawed way of thinking. I also have come to reject it, but I've stayed in, because I think Jesus wants me to help point to a better way.

Many people have a fundamental misunderstanding of the divide between the **sacred** and the **secular**. Now, I too use this language from time to time and it's ok as a short hand for separate spheres of authority for church and state for instance. But I'm talking about the idea that to be a holy Christian, you have to do everything you can to stay away from anything that smells like "this world". A sacred realm and a secular realm. I want to build the case with the rest of our time, that such a distinction isn't actually Biblical – well, not anymore at least.

Now, this separation idea *is* of course found in the Bible – as we've already read – and is heavily tied to the regulations about what is "clean" and "unclean" in the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. And boy there are a lot of them! I listen to a daily Bible reading that takes me all the way through the scriptures over the course of a year – I usually listen to it at home, but sometimes I won't get to it until I'm in the office and it plays through my speakers.

So, not long ago I was in the book of Leviticus and this chapter its just going on and on about women's menstruation and male nocturnal emissions and really gross sex stuff and all of the sudden, Monica pipes up from outside my office, "What are you listening to???" I almost got Me-Too'd for listening to the Bible at work! But there were all kinds of clean vs. unclean laws.

If you touched a dead body - animal or human being - if you had an infectious skin disease like boils or rashes or sores, if you came into contact with mildew - your clothes, articles in your home, or even in your house itself - if you had any kind of bodily discharge like diarrhea or a hemorrhage of blood and pus, or if you ate food made of animals that were designated as unclean - like the pig or lobster - you were considered ritually impure, defiled, unclean. Meaning what? It meant you couldn't go into the temple. You couldn't go in and worship God with the rest of the community. You were unclean. You were defiled. You were an outsider, cut off from the presence of God.

Now, that seems harsh, but it had a purpose. It's not as weird as it seemed. You have to remember that for these Jews, this was the first experience with monotheism – the worship of one God – that any people in the history of the world had experienced. Their neighbors all worshipped multiple Gods and some of them – *most* of them – were very cruel and pernicious and it was critical that God help His chosen people – the Jews – understand how different He was. How "set-apart" He was from the ways of all the other pagan gods. And so all of these cleanliness laws served as visual aides.

Those of you who are teachers – especially elementary or pre-school teachers – will understand this. In the early stages, children can't grasp abstract concepts, so you have to make it concrete – “A is for apple”, and you hold up some fruit. Even when we get to physics – modern physicists now that Newtonian gravity doesn't really work the way we think of when an apple falls from a tree, but it's easier just to keep the flawed visual model because it's really hard to understand otherwise.

So the Old Testament has all kinds of visual aides to help these newbies grow in God. But if you tried to have the same rules for college students that you have for pre-schoolers, “Ok class, let's all line up in single file to go to the restroom!” You would have madness. And so when Jesus showed up, his life was a graduate class in who God is.

And so that doesn't mean the Old Testament ways were wrong...they just didn't apply anymore. Jesus revolutionized a great many things. This is why we are Christians and not still Jews. You'd have to go back a few years to our *A Tale of Two Testaments* series, but we talked in detail about how to read the Old Testament in light of the New. They are *not* equal, Jesus is clear about that. It's not that he *abolished* the old codes, but that he *fulfilled* them.

But without doubt, Jesus' way is a “new and better way”. Jesus – his life, death, resurrection and ascension - is the decoder ring by which we read *everything* in the Bible – both what came before him and what came after. And when it comes to the clean and unclean codes of the Mosaic Law, Jesus couldn't be clearer. I want to read you an extended passage from Mark's gospel, and the context of this is an argument going on about just those morality codes – foods, certain ways to wash, things to avoid touching, etc. And here is what Jesus says...

Mark 7:14-19:

*“Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” 17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don't you see that **nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?** 19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus **declared** all foods clean.)”*

In the Greek, that word for “declare” is very strong, very forceful. This is not like “Well that's just your opinion, man.” No, Jesus is making a declaration – “These foods used to be unclean and now I *declare* they are clean.” And thank God because I *love* bacon! But this is revolutionary stuff.

Now, Jesus is using another phrase here that is easy to miss - that is very earthy and crude – we always translate these things into proper English sensibilities – but he’s literally saying that all that outside stuff is just crap. And I’m being crude intentionally – as I believe Jesus was – for a point we will come to in a moment.

But this was about more than food. He was talking about people as well. And Jesus makes that clear by living out what he thought. A common theme through the gospels is how Jesus was constantly touching or conversing with people that the Mosaic Law said he shouldn’t be. This was a constant complaint about him by the religious establishment, “How could a Holy Man ever...”

He touched lepers, he touched dead bodies, he touched women with issues of blood, he ate with sinners of every kind – even in their homes. People who would not have even known how to cook kosher if they wanted to. Now, this is not to say Jesus went to an “anything goes” model. No, his next statement makes it quite clear that he’s not actually rejecting the *concept* of clean and unclean. Oh no, you can still make yourself unworthy of the presence of God – in fact, later will learn that all of us do – but it’s in a less superficial way.

V.20-23, “*He went on: “What comes **out of a person** is what defiles them. 21 For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”*” See, what matters is not if you have long hair and tight britches like a rock star – that’s not what makes you unclean, that’s just outward appearance. What matters is the internal state of your heart and mind and soul - that’s a big deal. And you can’t always judge what’s inside a book by that cover.

Now, how could Jesus say this? Was he saying that the old way was wrong all along and that he was correcting God’s original plan? No, this *was* the plan all along. Jesus had a very high view of scripture. In fact, the Old Testament *itself* was pointing to this very fulfillment. You find it in many places. One is in the prophet Zechariah. Now Zechariah was a prophet just like Isaiah – and what he says is going to go right alongside Isaiah’s “come out from among them and be separate”. And of course both of them will be subject to the interpretation of Jesus.

In chapter 3, Zechariah is transported in a vision into the center of the temple. And this is the first thing he sees, **Zechariah 3:1**, he says, “*Then [the Lord] showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord...*” Now, this is a very specific reference and to understand it, you have to understand something about the Jewish temple and how it worked.

The temple had three parts to it: the outer court, the inner court, and the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was completely surrounded by a thick curtain – the width of a man’s hand. And inside was the ark of the covenant – the thing that melted the Nazis in Indiana Jones. And over it was the mercy seat – with two golden angles craved on it. This is what Zechariah is seeing in his vision.

And in the Holy of Holies, over the mercy seat was the very presence of God - the shekinah glory of God – and it was so powerful in its undiluted form that if you *saw* it, it would kill you. God’s power is just that overwhelming. But God allowed that on one day of the year – and *only* one day – one person – and *only* one person - was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies and actually, literally stand before the Lord.

That was the high priest of Israel. He could only do that on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. And he would do this in order to win forgiveness for the people, from God, for their sins. Therefore, what has happened to Zechariah is he has been brought into the center of the temple. He sees Joshua - the high priest in his day - standing before the Lord. The only time that could happen, the only day it could be happening, is Yom Kippur.

Now, the high priest did not take this lightly. There was a lot at stake. The week before the actual Day of Atonement - began his preparations. He was put into seclusion. He was taken away from his home, and he went into an apartment, as it were, where he was completely alone. Why? So he wouldn’t accidentally touch anything unclean, so he wouldn’t accidentally eat anything unclean. This was the people’s representative before God, he had to get it right. So he *separated* himself from normal life – that’s what holiness means by the way, “separated for God.”

The night before the Day of Atonement, he didn’t go to bed. He didn’t sleep. He stayed up all night praying and reading the Scripture to purify his soul. Then on the day itself, he did not wear the ordinary clothes, but he wore absolutely pure white linen. First he bathed head to toe, put on white linen, went into the Holy of Holies, and sacrificed for his *own* sins.

Then he came on out, and he bathed completely again. They dressed him in a whole new set of white clean and he went in again. This time he sacrificed for the sins of all the priesthood – the ones who were helping him. But that’s not all! Then he would come out and a third time he bathed again from head to toe – this guy had to be pruny after all these baths! And they dressed him in brand new, clean, pure linen. He went in a final time, and he atoned for the sins of the people.

And all this was done in public. Only he could go into the Holy of Holies, but the people who qualified to be in the inner courts were gathered and watching. The temple would have been crowded with people watching all of this. There was a thin screen that he actually bathed behind, but everybody was right there. At least the upstanding males of the community. Women had their own court, that was part of the separation laws.

But the men saw him bathe. They saw him dress. They saw him go in. They saw him go out. Each time. Why? Because he was their representative before God. They were there cheering him on. They were there very, very concerned to make sure that everything was done in the most perfectly pure way because he was their representative before God.

And if you understand how meticulous this permeation was – I mean talk about clean laws, there wasn’t a *speck* on him, there wasn’t a germ on him, he was as pure as pure could be - only if you understand that do you realize why the second part of this prophecy in Zechariah 3 was so shocking.

Because Zechariah looks up at Joshua the high priest on the Day of Atonement standing before the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. And it says, **(Zechariah 3:3)**, “*Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.*” Literally says he was covered in excrement – that’s the Hebrew idiom. Zechariah can’t believe his eyes. He looks up, and there is the high priest on the Day of Atonement representing the people before God, and his clothes are covered in feces and urine.

How could that have happened? Everything for a week has been moving toward him being clean. There’s no way the high priest would have ever allowed himself...there’s no way the Israelites would have ever allowed the high priest to appear before God like that. How could that be?

Well, remember that this is a prophetic vision, God is using this visual aide to point Zechariah – and thus us – toward a larger truth. And in that moment, it showed how God sees *us*. In spite of all the efforts we make to try to be pure, in spite of all the efforts to try to be good, try to be moral, try to cleanse ourselves – to stay separate - it doesn't work. God sees that our hearts – like Jesus would say later - are filled with filth.

So you can pass all the religious resolutions you want about not being contaminated by the world – it's too late. It's in your heart. The phone call is coming from inside the house! All of our external morality, all of our good works don't really get to the heart. And Zechariah suddenly realized that no matter what we do, we're unfit for the presence of God.

But just as he was about to despair, to his shock, God says this. V.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 fine garments on you."" But then he says something really cryptic, (v.8-9) *"Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch...and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day."*

Now, put yourself in Zechariah's place. He must be saying, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute! For years, we've been doing sacrifices. We've been doing the clean laws. We've seperated ourselves from everything. And yet, you can never get the sin off you, never get the sin off you, never get the sin off you." God is saying, "Zechariah, this is a prophecy. Someday *I will*. Someday it's all over. Someday the sacrifice is over. Someday the clean laws are all over." How?

Centuries later, another Joshua showed up, another Yeshua. Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua - it's the same word, you know - Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek. It's the same thing. Another Yeshua showed up, and he was going to pull off his own day of atonement. One week before his death, one week before his day of atonement, Jesus began to prepare. The night before, he didn't go to sleep.

But in every other way, what happened to Jesus was exactly the *reverse* of what happened to Joshua and all the other high priests who came before him. Because instead of a whole crowd of friends cheering him on, every single person who he loved betrayed, abandoned, or denied him. A bath? He was bathed in human spit. When he stood before God, instead of getting words of encouragement, the Father turned away from him. Instead of being clothed in wonderful garments, he was stripped of the only garment he had. He was beaten, and he was killed...naked, unclean, a shameful death.

And I want to show you what happened at the moment of his death. **Mark 15:37-38** records it, “*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” Remember the curtain? The curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from everybody else. The curtain that separated the truly clean from the unclean. The curtain that separated the sacred from the secular. No more separation!

Jesus death was the culmination of his life. He reversed the clean-unclean distinctions. See in the OT when a clean thing came into contact with an unclean thing – the clean thing become unclean. That’s why you’ve got to avoid the *appearance* of a rock n roller. But in the NT, when Jesus touched a bleeding women, she stopped bleeding. When Jesus touched a leper he got healed. When Jesus touched a corpse, it came back to life. Now, in the rule of King Jesus, when a clean thing comes into contact with an unclean thing – the unclean thing can become clean.

You say, “Oh well, that’s Jesus. That’s not you, so you better keep your distance just to be sure.” Nonsense. Jesus himself on the night he was to be arrested said, (**John 14:12**) “*Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*”

You know why? Because in that same passage Jesus promised that when he went to the Father he would send us the Holy Spirit in his place.. And on the Day of Pentecost that came to pass. Now every believer can have the power of the Spirit – the very presence that dwelt in the Holy of Holies – now lives...in...your...heart! Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. You don’t have to be afraid of the world. Nothing in the world can contaminate you...but *you* can heal the world. Because we’re all priests now...because Jesus Christ is our best and final high priest. Holiness is not primarily about how far we can get **from sin**, but about how close we can get **to Jesus**.

And so now, there’s no separation between the sacred and the secular – which doesn’t mean there’s *no* separation. Don’t get it twisted. Jesus said it’s still possible to be unclean, just not from the outside, but the inside. What does that mean? Now the distinction in the world is between **the flesh** and **the spirit**. We’re out of time, but go to Galatians chapter 5 and read about the acts of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. They are very clear. Very distinct. Very separate.

But here's the thing. Because what makes you unclean in internal, that means that you can be in a "sacred" place – like a church – and be absolutely walking in the flesh. Jealous, full of rage, ambitious, divisive, all of it. Or, you can be in the most "secular" place you can imagine – at da club – and be radiating God's Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, on and on.

We don't have to create our own spaces – the Holy Spirit is *everywhere* now. Because we are everywhere. Which is why now, yes I'm thankful for "Christian musicians" but what really thrills me are just "musicians who are Christians". By the way, same thing for "teachers who are Christians", "nurses who are Christians," "computer geeks who are Christians". Just moving in the influential places of the world and touching it with the love of Christ is ways big and small.

I used to be afraid of being "in the world". But then I noticed that Jesus wasn't. He delighted to be in the world. But he was never in the flesh. And if you have his Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you, you don't have to be either. And when you find that you are...you have a high priest...who exchanged his white linen for your filthy rags.

Don't be afraid. Don't be judgmental. And don't walk in the flesh either. Walk in the Spirit and you will make this world a better place...until he comes, and we all sing the Jesus Music together.

Let's pray...