

Zech. 13: 7-9 When God Gives Victory (part 4 The Cross & God's Refining of His People)

The more I read the prophet Zechariah as the Word of God to both Israel in their day and to us, I can only say with the Apostle Paul: **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”** I must confess, I have been greatly stretched in my studies of this book. My understanding of the plan of God to save his people through Kingdom of the Son has grown tremendously. And it is has come with great effort that I did not really expect before I preached this book. (apply) And, though I still cannot put EVERYTHING together as I would like, particularly in cps. 12-14, I would never trade the preaching of this book at this time in my life. And by the grace of God I hope you have gleaned nuggets of truth and application.

If we think back to cps. 12-13 so far, we see God fighting for his people to bring them VICTORY, and not just victory in one war, but VICTORY over all wars, VICTORY for God's people over ALL their enemies. And these are meant as words of comfort, words of praise, words to let the people know that the Sovereign God REIGNS, that He is moving history in his perfect plan to do good to his people and give them ultimate victory. I think back to cp. 1 as we see the man riding on the red horse standing beside the deep (1:8). This is not just a deep valley or a deep cavern or a deep hole. This is THE DEEP, ALL unknown, ALL evil, ALL calamities, ALL the mysteries of sin and death. And in this vision, an angel says to the Lord, **“How long will you have no mercy on us . . . against which you have been angry these seventy years?”** (v. 12) And in v. 13 we read: **“And the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel . . .”** And then in vv. 16: **“I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy, my house shall be built in it . . .”**

Brothers and sisters, these are God's promises to bring victory. But let me ask, **“Through whom will God bring this victory?”** Who is the man on the red horse? (v. 8) You know the answer! This is the true “ANGEL” of the Lord, the true “SERVANT,” the true “BRANCH” (Zech. 3:8), the true “PRIEST” the true “KING” (Zech. 6:13), the true “SHEPHERD” (Zech. 11:16). This is none other than the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why in cps. 12-14 we see the words, “in that day” seventeen times. Brothers and Sisters, we are in that day. We are living as citizens of the Kingdom of the Son and we say with the Apostle Paul: **“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Cor. 15:57).

Today I have 2 truths as we continue our theme of victory: 1) Victory comes through the cross of Christ, and 2) Victory comes through the refining work of God.

1. Victory Comes Through the Cross of Christ. Look at v. 7. **“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts.”** What glorious words we have before us! Here, Zechariah, in the context of giving victory to his people, we see that God's shepherd will die by God's sword. This language is used often in the OT to communicate that God will bring about his vengeance; He will bring his wrath on his enemies. And if he does not conquer his enemies, there will be no victory for God's people. How

terrible, yet how glorious are these words for the people of God! Now, you might say, “*Jon, how glorious can it be that God would strike down his own shepherd?*” And, “*How can this bring victory?*” Brothers and sisters, these are words of prophecy from Zechariah as he looks forward to a day when (look to 13:1) God will open a “fountain” that will cleanse his people from sin. Look back to 3:9. In his vision of the high priest, God says: “**For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.**” This is exactly what happens at the cross. These verses speak of a sacrifice, a death, an event that will give victory to his people.

These verses speak of a shepherd. And not just ANY shepherd, but God’s shepherd. And this shepherd will be a “man” who stands next to God. Here, we open the treasure chest of Zechariah and find the greatest of treasures! This treasure is the atonement of Christ. And in this text we see this shepherd will stand before God in two ways. 1. He is a man. In fact, he MUST be a man. Think back to the first man, Adam. He was God’s special creation, made in his image, made to spread the glory of God throughout the earth. He was the first man, the HEAD, the REPRESENTATIVE of all mankind. And we know that Adam sinned against God and failed to carry out his task as our head. And because of his sin, he will pay. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). And such is the case for all Adam’s offspring. Because of Adam’s sin, there can be no victory. In order for victory to come to God’s people, there must be another, a MAN who does not sin, a SUBSTITUTE for his people, ONE who will bear their punishment. Brothers and sisters, this is the cross of Christ. Zechariah knew the blood of bulls and goats could never give him victory, could never take away his sin (Heb. 10:4). Brothers and sisters, this is the cross of Christ! He is the great shepherd of his people. And unlike Adam, he did not sin. And he laid down his life as a man. John 10:11: “**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**”

Also, notice a 2nd way this “shepherd” stands before God. 2. He is divine. In the ESV we read: “**He will stand next to me.**” The KJV translates this phrase as, “***He will be my fellow.***” The NIV translates it as “***He will be close to me.***” The meaning goes much deeper. This word “*amith*” is used 11 times in the OT. And it is translated “*friend*” or “*neighbor*.” But, it carries the meaning of someone who dwells with God, one who is equal with God, an “associate.” What a mysterious truth! God the Son takes on flesh. This is the incarnation. In his essence, He is equal with God. I think of Phil. 2:6-8 which says, “**though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**”

In the cross of Christ, we have the 2nd Adam, the Eternal Son. And as the good shepherd, He lays down his life for his sheep. Through his death, the GREAT FOUNTAIN of God is opened to the world, that whoever believes in Him, will not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

A couple comments about these verses.

1. Notice also that God is the ONE who strikes the shepherd. Here we see the wrath of God being poured out upon the Son (v. 7). I think of Is. 53:10: “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief . . .”

2. These verses are used by Jesus, as he speaks of what will happen when he is taken and led to the cross. Matt. 26:30-31: “**And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’**” One implication of this is that what Jesus did, he did alone. For ONLY the perfect Son of God can accomplish victory for his people! This is why Peter can say in Acts 4:12 “***There is only ONE name under heaven by which a person can be saved.***” Or Paul in 1 Tim. 2:5: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . ***Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ***” (1 Cor. 15:57). Let’s move on.

2. Victory Comes Through the Refining Work of God. Look at vv. 8-9: “**In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.**” Here we see that God will judge the land, particularly the people of the land. Two thirds will perish while one third shall be left alive. We may argue that this prophecy is carried out in Jerusalem and the surrounding lands multiples times in its history. Of course, 70 AD was the last time this happened on a grand scale. Depending on what source you read, Jerusalem has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, captured and recaptured 44 times, and attacked 52 times. One source says there have been over 100 battles where the leadership has changed hands. But, let me emphasize that this is not Zechariah’s main purpose, merely to speak of such battles and wars with physical Jerusalem.

He is saying to God’s people of that day and to us today that God will keep his people from ultimate harm (which is clear from the separation of the one third with the two thirds). And AS HE KEEPS his people, He refines them. In this text, the “one third” are the remnant, those with faith. Look at v. 9. They are the ones who . . . “**will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’**” We will come back to that truth in a moment. Our truth here is that God will keep be faithful to keep his people. But, in his faithfulness, He will refine them. Look back to v. 7. “**I will turn my hand against the little ones.**” (We’ve already seen that this was fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. His disciples were scattered. But, after the resurrection, he gathers them again and on multiple occasions. And after being reunited with him, they say, “***My Lord and My God.***” (Thomas & Peter)).

So, what does this look like for us. Zechariah’s picture is that of silver and gold being refined with fire. Recently I watched *The Lord of the Rings*. And we get picture of the elves mixing the metals and then exposing them to extreme heat so that the rings come out pure. This goes along

with our truth two weeks ago that God is “cleansing” his people of sin. BUT, here the picture has more to do with all the trials, temptations, difficulties, and persecutions in this life. In this passage, God is doing TWO things. He is refining his people. And, at the same time, he is keeping his people. As silver and gold go through the fire and come out PURE, so God is sending his through fire that we might come out pure, shining, so that He gets the glory. I think of the Apostles in Acts. As they were beaten for preaching the name of Christ, they rejoiced “*that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*” of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

Brothers and sisters, this has been the experience of the church from the beginning. Think about it. What was the experience of Jesus? The CROSS! Jesus says to his church: “**A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you**” (John 15:20). And, “**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 5:10). Calvin, speaking of cp. 14 in general says “*This passage deserves special notice, as here is described to us the condition of the Church, such as it is to be until the end of the world; for though the Prophet speaks here of the intermediate time between the return of the people and the coming of Christ, yet he paints for us a living representation, by which we can see that the Church is never to be free or exempt from this evil — that it cannot drive away or put to flight domestic enemies.*”

And, besides persecutions, there are trials, there are temptations, there are great difficulties because of the effects of sin in this world. Now, God will not give you more than we can handle. He will see us through the fire. Life is short and full of troubles. And in God’s sovereign plan, He does refine us! But, He keeps us! Why? 1) We grow in godliness. We are being sanctified (last week). And 2) God gets the glory. I think of Paul in his physical struggle as he prayed 3 times that God would heal him. But, God does not! Instead he says: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul says, “**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me**” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Turn with me to 1 Pet. 1:3-9 where we find a perfect commentary. “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**”

Brothers and sisters, your life as a Christian is ONE BIG furnace of fire as God is refining you so that you will shine in perfection. A few applications:

1. As a Christian, you are not exempt from the trials and tribulations in this life. Instead, this is the will of God. This is part of your sanctification.

2. It is a good thing that you are being refined. God knows that you will come through unscathed. How? Because He is the one who made you. He is the one who gives you the Holy Spirit (Himself). He is the one that gives you powerful grace to keep going. When great sickness comes your way as you wait for the doctor's call, when anxieties flood your mind, when God takes your spouse or your child through death, when you lose your job or your position because of your faith and your morality as a Christian, when you think you can take no more, BE ENCOURAGED! FIND COMFORT in these words from Zechariah. God is refining you! And He will keep you!

3. God keeps his promise to keep you all the way to the end. In closing, look at the 2nd part of v. 9. **“They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”** This is what we do and we continue to do as Christians!

God will give us victory. This victory flows down from the great FOUNTAIN (v. 1) of the blood of Christ. And, this victory comes through the work of God in refining us.