

Lectionary Readings: Zechariah 12:10-14; 1 Corinthians 2:1-8; The Tenebrae: Christ's last seven words

Sermon Title: *God is Dead*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts on this Good Friday is from our Old Testament Reading: Zechariah, chapter 12.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, "*God is dead.*" So wrote a 19th century German philosopher named Friedrich Nietzsche. The expression, "*God is dead,*" is famously associated with Nietzsche's book titled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche, however, uses the phrase figuratively.

I. However, Zechariah uses the phrase literally: **God. Is. Dead.** Really? That's what God says in Zechariah 12:10: "*They will look upon Me Whom they have pierced.*"

"*Pierced,*" in this verse, means pierced with a spear, so as to kill. Don't glance. Don't glimpse. Take a long, hard look: **God. Is. Dead.**

Should we be surprised that God suffers and dies? You see:

- When God saw evil and misery multiply, He grieved with heart-piercing sorrow (Genesis 6:6).
- When God saw Israel's suffering in Egypt, He came down into the burning bush and said: "*I know their pain*" (Exodus 3:7).

However, as we consider the Suffering Servant Who is lifted high upon the cross on Good Friday, God is the only person in Isaiah's book Who is "*high and lifted up*" (Isaiah 6:1; 33:10; 57:15):

- What a mystery, therefore, that Isaiah describes the Servant with the same words: "*high and lifted up*" (Isaiah 52:13). Therefore, for your understanding, God and the Suffering Servant are one.
- Then, Isaiah goes on to write: "*But in fact, He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.*" (Isaiah 53:5)

Pierced. Crushed. Yes. **God. Is. Dead.** Not figuratively. Literally:

- John puts it this way: "*The world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him*" (John 1:10).
- Paul gasps: "*They crucified the Lord of glory!*" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

Zechariah continues: "*They shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only Son, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a Firstborn*" (Zechariah 12:10).

The only Son? The firstborn Son? That would be Jesus. Jesus is God and God is dead.

How did *that* happen? Remember the words of the Nicene Creed: “*by Whom all things were made.*” And, I might add: “*In Him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). You see:

- Christ, as God, created the tree from which His cross was carved.
- Christ, as God, created the minerals from which His nails were forged.
- Christ, as God, created the woman whose son was Judas Iscariot.
- Christ, as God, set in motion the political events that sent Pontius Pilate to Judea, Herod to Jerusalem and Caiaphas to serve as high priest.

Therefore, the implications are stunning. Christ, as God, arranged His own betrayal, torture and execution. To further explain this:

- At the cross, we see both our willingness to take up the piercing spear, as well as Christ’s willingness to take it.
- At the cross, we see the darkness of our hearts that murdered God, as well as God’s loving heart forgiving sinful wretches like us.
- At the cross we see Zechariah 12:10 fulfilled: “*They will **look** upon Me Whom they have pierced.*”

With the words of the Bible fulfilled:

- **Look** at Christ’s eyes, full of anguish and lament.
- **Look** at His cheeks caked with dirt.
- **Look** at His parched tongue poisoned with gall, and His face pale with death.
- **Look** at His hands pierced with nails, His arms stretched out, and the great wound in His side.
- **Look** at His perforated feet, and His blood-stained hands and feet.

You see, in less than four-hundred minutes (slightly less than seven hours), Jesus experienced an eternity of hell.

Therefore: **God. Is. Dead.** So, we ask the questions:

- “*God hung on a cross and was pierced with a spear?*”
- “*A split-lipped, puffy-eyed, blood-caked God on a cross?*”
- “*A sponge was thrust into God’s face?*”
- “*Dice tossed at God’s feet?*”
- “*God bled?*”
- “*God took nails?*”

Yes. Yes. A thousand times, and forever, yes. *For you!* We sing in the hymn: “*O sorrow dread! Our God is dead, Upon the cross extended. There His love enlivened us As His life was ended*” (LSB #448:2 – *O Darkest Woe*). Again, *For you!*

II. Therefore, thanks be to God, Zechariah 12:10 includes this promise from God: “*I will pour out on them the Spirit of grace.*”

As we look at that passage: Who is the “*them*”? Well, it’s the very perpetrators of Christ’s death! You see, God pours out His Holy Spirit of grace on the very people responsible for His death. Indeed:

- That would be me.
- That would be you.

What does the “*Spirit of grace*” (Holy Spirit) do? He breaks our hearts. In the words of Zechariah:

*“On that day the **lamenting** in Jerusalem will be as great as the **lamenting** in Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo [this refers to King Josiah’s death in 609 BC]. The land shall **lament**, each family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.”* (Zechariah 12:11-14)

As we look at that passage, Godly sorrow, from the heart, runs throughout it. When we consider the word **lament** from it, this passage describes the intense grief. And why is that? **God. Is. Dead.**

To further explain this, David writes: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise*” (Psalm 51:16-17).

You see:

- This kind of sorrow is very different from feeling bad because our sin was exposed.
- This kind of sorrow is much more than resolving to try harder next time.

Rather, this kind of sorrow laments. But this sorrow also looks. Where does it look? It **looks** upon God Who was pierced.

However, as you know, there are other options. Instead of lamenting and looking, we can be defensive about our sin:

- When we’re defensive about our sin:
 - We don’t admit anything.
 - We tell no one.
 - We keep the skeleton in the closet.
 - We seek innocence, not forgiveness.
- When we’re defensive about our sin we reduce life to one, passionate, all-consuming goal:
 - Hide the secret.
 - Cover it up.
 - Don’t address it.
 - Don’t admit it.
 - And whatever we do, never, ever confess it.

Then, too, when we see sin rear its monstrous head in our hearts, there is another option. Instead of lamenting and looking we can be being defeated. When we're defeated, we beat ourselves up repeatedly with blame and shame.

Again, defensive people hide sin. Defeated people replay sin.

What about depressed people? Depressed people lament over their sin, but never look. No, they never look upon the Pierced One. The Bible teaches about this option as well:

- Pharaoh lamented over the plagues that God was sending. He even said to Moses: *“Plead to the LORD to take away the frogs”* (Exodus 8:8).
- Judas Iscariot lamented for his sin and felt great remorse (Matthew 27:3-4).

However, neither Pharaoh nor Judas were forgiven. Why not? They didn't lament and look.

Defensive. Defeated. Depressed. Is there a better way? You bet there is! We can lament and look. John the Baptizer says of Jesus: *“Look, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29).

You see, the Lamb, the Pierced One, takes all sin away. That includes our sin:

- Our ugly sin.
- Our shameful sin.
- Our haunting sin.
- Our every single sin.

Thus, in fulfillment of what the Bible says, Jesus dealt decisively and completely with our sin by His sacrificial death at Calvary. He not only takes away our guilt – that's sin done *by* us. He also takes away our shame – that's sin done *to* us.

Therefore, We don't have to:

- Drink our sin away.
- Work our sin away.
- Explain our sin away.
- Eat our sin away.
- Cry our sin away.
- Bury our sin away.

This may be hard to believe. Most of us have carried our sin for so long that we can't imagine life without it. Maybe we can't imagine it, but God can. God does. And God does more than just imagine it. He gives us Jesus.

Conclusion: Therefore, dear friends in Christ, **look** at this God. Don't glance. Don't take a passing glimpse. **Look** – fix, fasten, rivet your eyes. *“Look, the Lamb of God Who takes away [present tense!] the sin of the world”* (John 1:29).

God. Is. Dead. On the cross. For you! Amen.

To God alone the Glory!