

Son of David, Have Mercy on Us | Advent of the King

The City of David or The Purge

Zechariah 12.10-13.9

December 18, 2022

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. ¹¹ "In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹² "The land will mourn, every 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; ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

^{13.1} *"In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. ² "It will come about in that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. ³ "And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD'; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies. ⁴ "Also it will come about in that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive; ⁵ but he will say, 'I am not a prophet; I am a tiller of the ground, for a man sold me as a slave in my youth.' ⁶ "And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will say, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.' ⁷ "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate," Declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones. ⁸ "It will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it. ⁹ "And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"*

After looking at *The Life of King David* (from about 1,000BC) this Fall... we're NOW moving toward Christmas, looking to see what happened to the promises or covenant God made with David as we find these promises developed in the Prophets. Today, the Prophet Zechariah's focus is the City of David.

He's writing around 500 BC. The Israelites had been prisoners of war relocated to Babylon, like 600 miles from their homeland. And then, 70 years later, some 42,000 Israelites were allowed to return to their plundered capital, Jerusalem. They're going to a home where most of them had never been. They rebuild their Temple and their city ...well... God's city...the place God had claimed for Himself, the Magnetic Center of God's mission: Jerusalem.

As you read the Hebrew Bible, you realize that this city (Jerusalem) is crucial to the whole story. We're all proud of our nationality and our city of origin – New York or Miami or Kingston or Bogotá – wherever you're from, BUT the allegiance the Bible writers feel for Jerusalem is far more than patriotism or pride or loyalty to the home team: it's devotion. They write poems/songs about this city: *"Glorious things of thee are spoken of you, O city of God...All my springs of joy are in you – O Jerusalem"* (Ps. 87.3,7).

This city is central to the great story that God writes for this planet. And the exiles, returning to this devastated place, these exiles had to know that Jerusalem WOULD RISE from the ashes like the "phoenix" but to what kind of future?

The previous section in CH 12 is full of triumphant promises for the future/destiny of Jerusalem/Judah. God will restore!

BUT the path to greatness will be a route that none of the Israelites expected. And there's a PATTERN here: that same road is the path anyone takes if he or she will live a significant life...not simply a life of fame or success or popularity (Hebrews 11.37-39) but true significance in the sight of God.

On the way to restoration and greatness, there must be a purge in the city – a cleansing. Cities are rarely famous for cleanliness but to be great, this city will have to be... decontaminated and will then become a SOURCE of purity and beauty to others. Let's see this pattern and path to greatness and how anyone who becomes great follows it:

#1 – A City Gripped by Grief

#2 – A City Flying to a Fountain

#3 – A City Refined and Restored

The passage begins with a layering of words and images meant to impress the reader with this sense of deepest, collective sadness: A murder occurs in this city, a stabbing and the killer...the city itself...goes into mourning.

And then the writer, the prophet, struggles to tell the reader just how overwhelming the grief of the city is... The sorrow is so profound; it's as if a parent is grieving the loss of a child...even that description is inadequate. It's as if a war took place (like when Israel was defeated on the Plain of Megiddo) and all the mothers and all the wives wept for the dead...It's as if (v.12) *"the land will mourn"* ...united regret.

And it's not as if people are getting swept away in group hysteria – you know when a person sort of goes along with the crowd and then wakes up and asks, "Hey...uh... why are we crying again?" (*"By themselves"* 11x!) – everyone is sincerely broken without pretense or emotionalism or group-think.

And THIS is the path to greatness? That's...uh...kind'a weird...I've never associated grief with greatness... (Neither had they!)

And if that's ironic or counter-intuitive here's the double-whammy: it turns out that this ability to weep and to be this deep-down broken and crushed... it turns out it's a gift from God.

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication"

In other words: "I will bless them with the ability to see/feel what they've done and with the ability to respond in a fitting way... I'll give them the ability to see that the real target of this stabbing, the One they were trying to get rid of, was God Himself! (Deicide!)

And that's why THIS crime calls for THIS degree of sorrow that Zechariah can hardly find words to describe...It's why he has to repeat things eleven times: "the Creator came to His creation...the Creator became created in order to relate to His creation ...and the creatures killed the Creator.

God chose Israel out of all the nations and He adopted Israel as His child...out of grace (Dt 7.7,9.6). But even that adopted child ...refused to welcome Him. Isaiah wrote, *"He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."* (53.3) God didn't measure up – so His own people joined with the Gentiles and got rid of Him.

It's the tragedy of all tragedies – the ultimate absurdity – creation rejects the Creator. The covenant nation rejects the Lord of the Covenant; the worst event ever to take place!

It's a prophecy...embedded in the Hebrew Prophets...500 years before Christ... God is telling us what will take place when He takes on our flesh in Jesus Christ: He, the incarnate God will be rejected to death. St. John put it this way: *"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."* (John 1.10-11)

And then, God will give the murderers eyes to see what they've done. He'll grant them the gift of repentance...

There can only be victory for Jerusalem if she first mourns and sees her own badness. She and the whole race with her are guilty of deicide – the murder of God. And yet, this murder somehow brings about mourning and cleansing.

Now why is grieving an essential component in greatness? Well, we all have to see the real problem keeping us from becoming what we were meant to be.

In 1910, G.K. Chesterton published a series of essays called “What’s Wrong with the World?” The title of that book was inspired by a title given to him two years earlier by *The Times of London*. That paper had asked a number of authors to write on the topic: “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton’s answer (though evidence for it is missing) at that time was the shortest essay submitted – he simply wrote: “Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton”.

To know that I AM the problem is important and to know that the problem with me is that I want to build my life around something other than God...I want to be independent of God...I want God out of the picture...and I WANT to put something else in His place. *If I don’t see that and if it doesn’t break me...crush me to the point of despair, then I will, all my life, be chasing the wind.* I’ll be seeking a cure for something that’s not the real disease.

When, however, God graciously gives the diagnosis...and gives the people a heart to want the cure (that phrase, “I will pour on them... a spirit of grace and supplication” really means “a spirit to seek grace”) When He gives that gift, He also gives the cure – “a fountain for cleansing” (13.1).

"In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. It will come about in that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land..."

God won’t convince them they’re dirty and then leave them that way – He’ll open a fountain for cleansing in the polluted city. He’ll speak His final word into and through the City of Jerusalem – as we noted, the murder had redemptive significance. God, in Jesus Christ was the One pierced and, in the death of Jesus Christ, God was absorbing our real problem. God Himself was taking the blame and “God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”. (2 Cor 5.21) Adam tried to blame God from the start (*“it was the woman YOU gave me”* Gen 3.12) but in the end, God takes the blame... undeserved and in love.

For all who come to despair and who feel the grief of their own guilt and their skewed, distorted way of relating to God (wanting God gone – it’s like wanting oxygen gone “so I can breathe my own way!”) and everyone who receives the gift of redemptive grief and comes to this fountain – that person finds relief from His remorse and shame – God cleanses it.

And God begins to quench the thirst that our idols could never quench. Notice the list of evils that the fountain washes away: “sin, impurity, idols, prophets, and the unclean spirit” ... WAIT? Go back over that...once more!

It’s like that Sesame Street song, “one of these things is not like the others...” Why are prophets listed among the evils?

It's because after a person comes to this fountain, it ends the speculation – there is, in a sense, no reason for another word from God: I've come to know God and He has known me! (Jer. 31.34) It IS finished. God's final Word is spoken. It's not to say that all my questions are answered (I don't have all the answers! I don't even know all the questions!)

A Christian is a person who recognizes that He is averse to God... He mourns over that ("Blessed are those that mourn", said Jesus in His inaugural speech) and then is cleansed... The big issue is settled... we're not Jedi Masters who know every answer and can solve every mystery... but we're bound for restoration and destined for greatness, called "Holy".

The big question is answered, "I know God". In a similar way I can say I know the Atlantic Ocean. I know how to get there. I've been on it. I've been in it. I've tasted it...experienced it. What percentage do I know? Very small percentage. But I do know enough that if someone held up a violin and said "This is the Atlantic Ocean!" I could say, "Oh, no it's not."

I know Christians get into trouble for saying we know God...and it strikes many non-Christians as arrogant...and I'll be the first to say, "Christians are arrogant"- more than we know! BUT it's not less arrogant to say, "Hey, all religious claims are only opinion...AND I KNOW THAT TO BE TRUE."

Well, if you know it to be true... aren't you making an "arrogant claim of absolute truth"?

What Christians DO believe is that we're ALL really messed up in the way we think about God and ourselves and others and that in the City of David, Jerusalem...on a hill far away, God opened a Fountain...God spoke a final Word...in that sense the speculation is over.

Last, A City Refined and Restored: this prophecy was very specifically fulfilled when Jesus Christ was arrested and crucified and the disciples fled for their lives, (v. 7) "*Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered*". Three of the four Gospel writers make explicit reference to this prophecy.

And it goes on to say that the whole event becomes a kind of watershed for the Great City: some see it and reject it and others see it and embrace it and thereby remain in the True Jerusalem – the remnant – the City within the city – the people of God.

And those who do mourn over their part in the "deicide" and who do come to the fountain...they are refined by it...are cleansed and changed. The NT calls the whole Christ-event a scandal, a stumbling block...to face your own fallen-ness and then to see that the solution lies NOT in anything you can do to shape up but that God had to take your place.

In Christ's living obediently for you and dying sacrificially in your place and in rising victoriously for you, you find the cure, the Fountain, the Shepherd struck down for the sheep. No other word is needed.

It's a scandal – it's the opposite of religion, which says "you shape up and THEN God rewards you". The Good News of Jesus says, "You are messed up and God rewards you...He declares (v.9) 'You are My people' and we say "The Lord is My God"" and receiving God's gift WILL revolutionize you from the inside out. It changes everything.

Only people who are scandalized and humbled are qualified to help others find God. That's what God wanted for the City of David all along to be "*the city on a hill*" helping the nations know God...And if they were ever going to do that, there had to be a cleansing in that City.

And IF YOU will enter the New Jerusalem, the Church, and ever be truly useful as a servant, a great one, you have to go through this same cleansing... and you learn in time that it's the central plank in the Christian platform – I see my sin, God blesses me with mourning, I run to that One Fountain we can trust... It's the path of repentant faith and daily renewal.

QUOTES:

Any G.K. Chesterton fan remembers his reply to a query from the *Times* of London. Supposedly a *Times* editor wrote to several early 20th-century authors, asking, "In your opinion, what is wrong with the world today?" The great essayist replied, "Dear sir: I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton."

Perhaps too delicious to be true, and it may not be. The Chesterton Society has found no documentary evidence for it, so even if the letter was sent, it likely wasn't published. Still, the story has a very Chestertonian flair. He published a book of essays, *What's Wrong With the World*, in 1910, and perhaps that title didn't come out of the blue.

– Janie B. Cheaney, "What's wrong with the world? (And where do we place guilt?)" (*World Magazine*, December 29, 2021)

There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench His determination to bless me. There is, certainly, great cause for humility in the thought that He sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow-men do not see (and I am glad!), and that He sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself (which, in all conscience, is enough). There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, He wants me as His friend, and desires to be my friend, and has given His Son to die for me in order to realise this purpose. We cannot work these things out here, but merely to mention them is enough to show how much it means to know, not merely that we know God, but that He knows us.

-J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (1973; InterVarsity Press, p. 37)