

Title: Through the Fire
Text: Zechariah 13: 7-9
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Zechariah 13: 7: Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is my fellow*, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. 8: And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. 9: And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Our text is verse 9. We will focus our attention on the fiery trials which the Lord brings his people through. But first let's notice a few things in context. This is what shall happen in this gospel day in which we live.

First, this happens after Christ has suffered on the cross for his people.—“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” (Zech 13: 7) It was God who awakened the sword of justice against Christ when he bore the sin of his people. Christ is God's Shepherd. God the Father chose his Son to be the Shepherd of his sheep. He chose Christ to save his people from our sins by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. Christ is God's fellow. He is one with God, equal with God, God with us. His work brought eternal satisfaction to eternal justice for each one for whom he died.

Secondly, notice, when God smote the Shepherd, God scattered his sheep into the four-corners of the earth, “smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” (Zech 13: 7) God's sheep are not sheep because they live in America or France or Israel. God's sheep—true Israel—are those chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Think of the folly if I said, “God chose me and called me because I was born in Union County, Arkansas.”

When God calls his sheep, it is not with respect to persons—not because of the country they live in or their race—it is because they are the elect of God by his pure grace! (Rom 9) To say God calls a sinner because of anything in us—because we live in Israel or England or Germany—is to make salvation to be by works, by something in us, rather than by grace.

Now that God has finished with political Israel, before God, there is no physical distinction. God's sheep are his elect scattered amongst the nations of the world: some are in Israel, some in America, some in other places. But thank God, by his sovereign and free grace, he shall call each one because we are the sheep of God

Thirdly, we see that in this gospel age, our risen Lord and Savior is gathering his sheep out of every nation on this earth—“and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.” (Zech 13: 7) It is God who gathers his people from among the inhabitants of the world, out of spiritual darkness, into his spiritual kingdom—not we ourselves.

Fourthly, we are told what God is doing throughout all the earth right now in this gospel age—“And it shall come to pass, in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein.” (Zech 13: 8) Of the greater part of men in “all the land”—in all the earth—God will cut off 2/3rds and they shall die. It includes professing, hypocritical believers, as well as reprobate men. But the third part shall remain. This is God's elect remnant. These are Christ's redeemed. These shall be born of the Holy Spirit.

What will become of those God gathers by his grace? What shall God do for us in this gospel age? Believer, what is God doing with you right now? They shall each be brought “Through the Fire.”

GOD’S PREDESTINATION

First, God predestinated that God will bring each of his elect through the fire, “And I will bring the third part through the fire.” (Zech 13: 9) Believers should expect the fiery trial. Heirs of the kingdom above are heirs of tribulation below; reigning with Christ above means suffering with Christ below; to be crowned with glory above is to bear the cross below.

Our flesh does not like the fire of trial. Our flesh tries to escape the fire. But inwardly, we should rejoice in the fire. Why? The fire is of God. He said, “I will.” “The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” (Ps 7: 9) “The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” (Ps 11: 5) The fiery trial is of God whatever kind it may be.

Our conversion is a fiery trial, because Christ is a fire. He sends his preacher with the gospel to announce his arrival then Christ comes to refine.

Malachi 3: 1: Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. 2: But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: 3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

The only way we—as king and priests—will come to God only in Christ our Righteousness is by Christ purging us of every vain work of dross, every vain confidence.

So, too, God’s word is a fire, “Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord?” (Jer 23: 39) Every Christ’s sent preacher is full of fire. When the gospel goes forth, the word burns up all wood, hay, and stubble. False hopes, false zeal go up in flames. William Gatsby said, “When God brings Christ and the sinner together, there is an alarming blaze of the whole of the sinner’s lumber.”

Therefore, when you are converted and stand with Christ and Christ’s people—expect the fire of persecution.

1 Peter 4: 12: Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14: If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Then there are all sorts of trials in God’s providential dealings with his child.

One, God forces you to make sacrifices, to part with what you love and value most. God called Abraham to take sides with Christ, against Abraham’s own son, Isaac. (Gen 22:1) Through the law, God makes his true Israel part with our vain righteousness and beg for Christ to be our Mediator. (Ex 20:20)

Also, God leads his people in a difficult way through life, making his people live by faith in Christ alone. Israel’s journey is the believer’s journey—

Deuteronomy 8: 2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. 3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Furthermore, God leaves false preachers and false religion in this world to try his people—

Deuteronomy 13: 1: If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2:...saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3: Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Also, God gives us choices in life to try us, “In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.” (1 Ki 3: 5) At the heart of every choice in life, God is setting before us the same choice he set before Solomon. Will you choose long life? Riches for thyself? The life of thine enemies? Solomon asked for “understanding to discern judgment.” Will you choose a long life of ease with your family, your grandkids, in false religion? Or ask Christ to be your Wisdom? Will you choose riches—promotion, fat salary, separated from the gospel of Christ? Or ask for Christ your Wisdom? When Solomon asked for understanding, God not only gave him wisdom, God added those lesser things as well. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8: 32)

At times, Christ sets the impossible before us to teach us not to lean to our understanding but to look only to Christ, “When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.” (Jn 6: 5-6) Christ knows what you and I will do. Christ knows what he himself will do. Our best answer is, “Lord thou knowest!”

Then Christ makes us wait on him which is a fiery trial. When Mary and Martha sent word that Lazarus was sick, the Lord abode two days where he was before going to raise Lazarus. (Jn 11: 6) He let Hezekiah chatter until Hezekiah cried, “Lord undertake for me!” When I was a child I was once surrounded by coyotes. It made me run to my father. When men are not alarmed, they walk instead of run. Scripture says, “He that believeth shall not make haste.” Christ will have us trust and wait on him so that we walk by faith even through the fire.

Also, Christ even puts us in the fire when we faithfully serve him. Paul was faithful. But Christ had him cast into prison and to bear many stripes—(Acts 16:23-24) Yet, it was God’s way of saving the Philippian jailor. We could go on and on. But whatever kind of fire we endure, God is the first cause—“I will”—the fire is of God.

GOD’S PURPOSE

The first purpose of the fire is to refine us, “I will...refine them as silver is refined.” (Zech 13: 9) We each love our flesh and things of this world. But those things are not profitable. So Christ refines his child, “I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.” (Is 1: 25) In the fire, he burns up our dross. Nothing shall remain but what comes from him, stands in him, and leads to him.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Also, the purpose of the fire is to try us, “I will try them as gold is tried.” (Zech 13: 9) It is to prove that our faith is the gift of God and upheld by God, so that God receives the glory. Earthly gold will endure much fire. It is precious metal. But gold will not endure the “seventh fire”—the fire heated seven times will melt gold. But God knows the faith which he gives his child is “more precious than gold.”

It is because our faith is born of the word of God and upheld by the word of God. And the word of God is more precious than gold. It will endure the seventh fire, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” (Ps 12: 6-7)

Therefore, by God’s word, by God’s promise, by God keeping us, by God preserving us, our faith will endure the fire heated seven times. So God puts his child into the hottest fire of trial "that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, though tried in the fire, may be found to [God’s] praise and honour and glory," (1 Peter 1:7)

So the purpose of the fire is that when God brings us through the fire we stand as monuments of his discriminating mercy so that all praise and all glory goes only to our faithful God before this world and to all eternity.

GOD’S PROMISE

First, not only is the fiery trial of God but God promises to bring us through it, “I will bring the third part through the fire.” (Zech 13: 9)

Isaiah 43: 1: Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. 2: When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. 3: For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour:

Secondly, Christ will go with us through the fire. He said when you pass through, “I will be with thee.” He was in the furnace when they threw his three servants in the fire. And Christ brought them out, “whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.” (Dan 3: 25-27)

God’s promise is that he will accomplish his purpose in the fire. They say as soon as a refiner can see his own image in the silver, he considers it pure. Likewise, when God purges our dross and sees Christ image in us he delivers us from the fire. What does that mean for God to see Christ’s image in us? It is in the next part of God’s promise.

Thirdly, God promises to bring his child to this point, “they shall call on my name.” (Zech 13: 9) We truly call on God when he has brought us to call on Jehovah Jesus. But we cannot rightly even think of prayer without the fire. Saul of Tarsus thought he had called on the name of the LORD many times. But when God put him in the fire, he found he had never prayed before. Then, God himself, said to Ananias, “Behold! He prayeth.” (Acts 9: 11)

When called to pray publicly, we do very little praying. Instead, we concentrate on saying the right words—pretty words. But in the fire, there are no pretty words. But then the Spirit “helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom 8: 26) True prayer is when we are utterly weak. It is in our broken, unconnected sentences, in sighs and groans from a poor soul in the fire. “Lord, save me!”—was Peter’s finest prayer! (Mt 14: 30)

When we were not in the fire, we become cumbered with dross: affections for this world, wandering after every forbidden thing, but when God puts us in the fire—in the hour of conversion, in every season of trial, in our final hour—these are times when there no audible words; when we are too weak for pretty words; when we know we cannot save ourselves. That is when God has brought his fiery purpose to pass, when he brings this promise to pass—“they shall call on my name.” This is only by Christ dwelling in you—and that is when God sees Christ’s image in his child.

Then at last, God brings this promise to pass, “and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.” (Zech 13: 9) Our Savior knows we can never do without him; so he makes us to know it as well. When he brings us to call on him, he says “It is my people” and in our hearts, he makes us hear him say it!

Romans 5: 3:...tribulation worketh patience; 4: And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Then Christ appears glorious to us poor sinners and we say, “The Lord is my God!” Here is the whole point of the trial. When God has brought his purpose and promise to pass through the fire then we realize, God loves us as well when he hides the light of his countenance as when he shines upon us; when he suffers us to grope within as when he raises our hopes and expectations to himself; when he chastens us as when he smiles upon us; when he afflicts us as when he comforts us; when in the fire as when on the mountain.

The reality is that it is his love that sends the fire to purge us, to bring forth the pure gold of faith in him. It is only then that we truly behold that Christ always hears us and is always saving us, that he is truly our God.

It is easier to talk about God's love than always to believe it. But we can be sure, God will bring us to believe more and more, his love for us is from everlasting to everlasting, so that we believe and walk and pray with a pure heart, knowing, “The LORD is my God!”

Amen!