

A REFINED PEOPLE

Zechariah 13:1-9

How would we describe a “refined person?” What type of mental picture do we “see” with just the mention of that idea? The things that might come to mind are, first of all, the outward appearance of the person. The person would be well groomed, conservatively dressed, pleasant facial expression, and they would have an aura of confidence and serenity. The second indication would be that the person would be well spoken, would not be loud and boisterous, would be gracious toward others, and would use words and patterns of speech that would be acceptable in any situation.

How would most of us feel about being in the presence of such a refined person? Would we be comfortable or uncomfortable? The answer to that question might depend on how we see ourselves. If we saw ourselves as projecting the antithesis of these good qualities, then we might be quite uncomfortable. How we deal with that discomfort would say a lot about our character. Would we respond by avoiding being around those who are “refined” or might we be inspired to follow their example?

A person with whom I used to work related a story from his life experience that somewhat illustrates this idea. He was working at the local manufacturing plant to support his young family of a wife and two small children. He experienced an on-the-job injury and had to be off from work for about a week. At that time his family was struggling financially and they were living in a mobile home on a vacant lot that just had utilities available. They were using scrap wooden boards for a “walkway” to walk from the road to the trailer. Because a “lost-time” injury was a “big deal,” some of his supervisors came to visit him to check on his progress and show that they were concerned. He saw them drive up and went out to meet them as opposed to having them come into his humble dwelling. In his words, he was totally embarrassed with his situation being in the presence of these “well-dressed, well-groomed, refined people.” The embarrassment was that he was wearing old and dirty clothes, was living in pitiful conditions, and was standing out in the yard on a board to avoid the muddy ground, and carrying a whiny baby who was wearing nothing by a diaper. He said that the visitors were gracious, but he was totally embarrassed and vowed that he would never be in that condition again.

Another idea related to being refined is that of purity. We talk about gold and silver being refined and the purpose of that process is to remove any impurities. I recently read a story about a group of students in India who took a field trip to a small gold refining operation and they saw how the gold ore was repeatedly heated and skimmed until the person doing the operation was satisfied with the result. The kids ask him how he knew the process was completed. He said that it was pure when he could see his face in the molten metal.

The spiritual implications related to the desirability of being refined would have a lot of similarities related not only to cleanliness and purity but also to proper behavior and how we conduct our lives and relate to others. We can certainly agree that God would have His people to be refined in every sense of the meaning of that word. In the prophecy of Zechariah we see that God was projecting toward a time when His people would be such that if someone looked into their lives they could see the face of the Refiner.

As we try to understand the prophetic words in Zechariah 13:1-9, it may be helpful to look back to the previous chapter to try to get the context of the bigger picture. There are at least two major thematic ideas regarding the time (chronologically) when these prophecies would be fulfilled. One group sees it primarily related to the Second Advent of Christ in the future and

another sees these prophecies finding fulfillment in the First Advent of Christ and the establishment of the church. Since we have not yet experienced the Second Advent but have accounts of the First Advent, we will focus on the implications of these prophecies and how they can be related to the church and to our individual lives.

If we examine Zechariah 12:1 through 13:9 we can identify at least five major groups of various events. It appears that Zechariah listed these groups in an inverse chronological order. For example, the following events can be seen:

We see in 13:7-9 the LORD's shepherd is struck, the sheep are scattered, there is severe purifying, and the covenant promise is reaffirmed. This could be a summary statement of the crucifixion and the subsequent events that impacted the church and even physical Israel.

The next group of events is found in 13:2-6 where we see the removal of idols and false prophesy. This removal would be possible by the defeat of the devil by what Christ accomplished on the Cross. The implementation of this in the church is recorded in New Testament letters of Paul, Peter, and Jude.

The third happening is related to cleansing of the people of God as seen in the provision of the fountain mentioned in 13:1 and would be symbolized by the soldier piercing the side of Christ on the Cross and the outpouring of water and His blood.

The fourth event (12:10-14) is the mourning and grieving of the people when they realized whom they had crucified. The historical account of this is found in Acts 2:37 where the people were "pricked in their hearts" when they heard Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost as he spoke convincingly of Whom they had "pierced" in the crucifixion of Jesus.

The final events found in 12:1-9 are about the ineffectiveness of the nations to attack and defeat Jerusalem. If we put this in the context of the church being Jerusalem, then we know that the church has not only survived but flourished when it has been under attack.

The Fountain that Cleanses – 13:1

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. Zechariah 13:1 (NASB95)

The phrase "in that day" is used sixteen times in the last three chapters of Zechariah's prophecy. One of the cautions that we should note is that sometimes in Old Testament prophecies there is a "flattening" of the time scale in which various parts of a group of prophetic events are to occur. It is difficult to know if "that day" is the same chronological day in all sixteen cases. Some of these referenced events might have occurred in the short term of Zechariah's time, some could be related to the first Advent of Christ, or some might be related to the Second Advent and Millennial Kingdom.

Many relate the "opening of the fountain that cleanses" with the shed blood of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. This "opening" is symbolically related to the piercing of the side of Jesus when He was on the Cross. This historical event is found recorded in John 19:34 "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water."

The prophesied benefits of this fountain were for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This is stated by some commentators to be a way of saying that the cleansing power of this fountain was available for all of God's people whether they were royalty and in leadership (house of David) or ordinary citizens of Jerusalem.

If there is an implied limitation to Jerusalem and not to all humanity, then an argument could be made that this would really be applicable only to those who will inhabit the New Jerusalem of the Millennial Kingdom. Alternatively, one might argue that if this is meant for the church, then the use of the name Jerusalem here was intended to denote the Church. This would

be in agreement that the church is made up of those who have experienced cleansing by the blood.

The effectiveness of this “fountain” is seen in the statement that was for sin and impurity. Sometimes we don’t recognize that there is a difference in what these two terms imply. The use of the term sin is related to the basic nature of humanity or “who we are” as descendants of Adam. On the other hand, impurity is related to our not being properly attired or purified so as to participate in acts of worship which bring us into the presence of God. For those who receive God’s salvation offered in Christ Jesus the “sin” issue is dealt with in the new birth by which the old nature is dead and, therefore, not subject to the curse of the law. This is the part of our salvation that we describe as “justification” in that we are declared by God to be saved by His grace through faith in the shed blood of Christ as an atonement for our sin.

Impurity, on the other hand, is dealing with the ongoing transformation of our lives and the need to deal with the fact that we do commit errors and miss the mark in our lives even though we are judicially justified.

Normally, when the subject of this “fountain” is discussed we think in terms of what the hymn says about a “fountain fill with blood.” Did you notice, however, what John recorded about what happened when the soldier pierced the side of Jesus that both “blood and water” came out? Perhaps the New Testament writings will help us understand this. We see in 1John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” We might legitimately ask “what is the implication and purpose of the water?” In Ephesians 5:25-27 we read that “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

We can generalize that the blood is associated more with our justification and the water (as in washing as with water by the Word) is associated more with our sanctification and purity. It is helpful in this comparison to review the interchange that Jesus had with Peter in the upper room when Christ washed the disciples’ feet. We recall that Peter first objected to the Lord washing his feet since it was contrary to protocol of that day since it was the job of a servant to wash the feet of the guests.

Jesus’ answer was that if He doesn’t wash us that we have no part in Him. It seems apparent that the “washing” to which Jesus referred was what results from appropriating the benefits of the “fountain that would be opened” as mentioned in Zechariah. Peter’s response was to submit himself to be washed all over and not just his feet. Jesus responded to Peter that he had already had a bath. Taking a bath was the expected preparation for Jews who were going to participate in the Passover observance. This is (likely) what was implied by the statement “You are clean except for your feet.” Why were their feet not clean? They wore sandals and walked on dusty roads and paths. This “contact with the world” with their feet had resulted in uncleanness because of that contact. The remedy to restore purity to their feet was washing with water. This is an easy step to figure out that the remedy for removing the detrimental effects of contact with the world in our spiritual lives is to have a regular application of the Word of God as in “washing as with water by the Word.”

Disarming the Enemy – 13:2-6

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.’ Zechariah 13:2-6 (NASB95)

In a very real sense, the sense of abhorrence to false gods and idols was ingrained in the national conscious of the Jews. They had learned the lessons of the consequences of setting up physical idols and going through the motions of pagan worship and adopting pagan customs. Based on this, we could argue that “that day” was a reference to what had already begun during the time of Zechariah. However, as we know from Scriptural accounts, that abhorrence to physical idols and pagan worship practices did not eliminate the adoption of bad ideas, false philosophies, and reliance on works as a means of being pleasing to God.

Even during the time of Jesus’ first advent, the people had abandoned pagan idol worship and had adopted obsessive observance of a multitude of rituals that were instituted to replace the simple concepts of “love God with your total being and love your neighbor as you love yourself.” There was a very real dedication to eradication of any other ideas than “the strict keeping of rituals” as a means of salvation. They would even kill to protect that erroneous idea. They crucified Christ, they stoned Stephen, and many others were arrested, put in prison and some were forced to leave the area to escape the persecution.

How can we apply the lessons and applications of the prophecy found in verses two through six to our present-day situation? We have the examples of what Paul did in many of his letters to the early church in combating false teachers and philosophies. We (as Christians) can teach and make people aware of what is false and what is true in our communication with others. There is an on-going battle today and it appears that those in the world system have wholeheartedly accepted the teaching of unclean spirits and false prophets and those who proclaim lies as if these were truth. Even when the lies are exposed and the philosophies are shown to be in error most people (in the name of tolerance) don’t seem to care. There is certainly no national outrage that many in positions of leadership blatantly lie. The only national outrage seems to come from someone who might inadvertently make a “politically incorrect” statement.

It is somewhat obvious that the names of idols or false gods are not absent in our nation or our land. There are many people who put on the mantle of a prophet and endorse false philosophies and ideas. In an ideal situation there would be a removal of evil influences. We would not tolerate lies, cheating, and immorality as our national or group ethic. Evil would be recognized as “evil” and it would be condemned. Good would be recognized as good and would be commended. This is just the opposite of what we see developing in our nation today. Not only has the practice of calling good “evil” and evil “good” infiltrated our national mind set, it is also seen in some churches.

How would we apply the remedy prescribed in verses two through six? We don’t kill our children when they reject Christ and we don’t see a lot of wholesale repentance of false prophets. The most effective thing that we can do is to apply these remedies to our own personal “land” or our spiritual-life situation. Have we cut off the names and even the memory of idols from our own spiritual landscape? Is it going too far to say that we should abandon the use of the term Easter in reference to the Resurrection of Jesus? Should we be diligent to determine the origins of various common practices such as “knocking on wood” to bring us “luck” and instead acknowledge the total sovereignty and control of Jehovah God in our lives? There are so many

things woven into the fabric of our culture that we would have to make a complete break with the culture and start over in our relationship with “spiritual” matters. Wait a minute, is that what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17? *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* Maybe we have stumbled onto something!

Coming with this new outlook and spiritual perspective we would systematically disavow ideas that we had in times past. Some people get involved in other religions and ideas prior to being born again and these ideas need to be repudiated and declare them to be dead to us. This would be in agreement with what Paul wrote to the Roman Christians in Romans 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The Strike that Frees – 13:7

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. Zechariah 13:7 (NASB95)

The use of the term sword is said by some to be a generic term for an instrument of death. If this is a reference to the crucifixion of Christ, then we would see that the instrument of death was the cross and we fully agree that the description of the person who was struck exactly fits what the Scriptures teach us about Christ Jesus.

After Jesus was crucified, there were several “scatterings” of the sheep. This first would be on the night of Jesus’ arrest. They scattered for their own personal safety. After the church started growing in Jerusalem opposition arose from the Jews and persecution began which resulted in many of the Jews fleeing to other areas which some have described as a “scattering.” Some historical accounts tell us that many Jewish Christians from Jerusalem fled to a city named Pella across the Jordan river about a month before the Roman attack in A.D. 70.

The last part of verse seven reads in various translations (NAS, RSV, and NIV) as “I will turn My hand against the little ones.” The KJV renders “against” as “upon.” Some commentators see this as a purging of members of the early church in the same way that many of the Jews in Jerusalem were killed by the Romans in A.D. 70. Others view this in the same context as Isaiah 1:25 which reads “I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy.” For the individual Christian this would be the refining process for the individual as God uses all things for our good that we might become more like Jesus.

The Fire that Refines – 13:8-9

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.’” Zechariah 13:8-9 (NASB95)

Some commentators think that this is something that will happen under the reign of the Anti-Christ prior to the Second Advent. Other see this as the saving of the Christian Jews from the disaster that happen in Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. Those who were driven away by the persecution of Jews avoided the Roman destruction. Those Christians who left Jerusalem still had testing and refining experiences at the hands of the Gentiles and many were martyred. Those who remained faithful still called upon the name of the Lord and He reaffirmed the covenant promise that “They are My people” and they testified that “the Lord is my God.”