

"A Cup of Reeling, A Heavy Stone and A Flaming Torch!"

04/01/12 - Palm Sunday

Zechariah 12:1-13:1
Luke 19:28-40

- I. LAST YEAR ON GOOD FRIDAY, IF YOU HAD DRIVEN DOWN TURNBULL CANYON ROAD IN HACIENDA HEIGHTS OUTSIDE LOS ANGELES, YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN THE GUTTED REMAINS OF ST. JOHN VIANNEY CATHOLIC CHURCH.
 - A. ***This church had been destroyed by arson the night before.***
 1. It took firemen 2 ½ hours to put the blaze out at the midnight hour.
 2. Archbishop Emeritus of Los Angeles, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony visited the scene that same day, Good Friday, April 16.
 3. How would you have felt if you come to this church on Good Friday and saw the church burned down, our windows gone, the bell tower in ashes?!
 - a. One 43 year-old woman grew up in the St. John Vianney Church. She recalled how she had her first Communion and how she had grieved at her parent's funeral. "My happiest and saddest memories are here," she said, "I just feel like I lost my home."

- II. THIS WAS THE SAME TASK TWO OF THE LAST PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT FACED IN THE 5TH CENTURY BCE WHEN THEY WERE ALLOWED BY THE PERSIAN KING CYRUS TO RETURN TO JUDAH WITH THE EXILES TO REBUILD JERUSALEM AND THEIR BELOVED TEMPLE.
 - A. ***Haggai and Zechariah may have worked together long before Nehemiah or Ezra © 520)***
 1. God gave these two a common vision, to build new hope and an ethnic pride for the depressed exiles.
 - a. The people who stayed during those 70 years did not welcome them back.
 2. Dr Thomas L Constable, in his "Notes on Zechariah," observes that "If Haggai was the builder, responsible for the solid structure of the new Temple, Zechariah was more like the artist, adding colorful windows with their symbolism, gaiety and light."

 - B. ***About all we know of Zechariah is what is read on Palm Sunday, about the king who "comes to you triumphant and victorious ... riding on a donkey."***
 1. Where do you find him in the Old Testament? Why did Jesus re-enact that prophecy in Zechariah, chapter 9? [PAUSE]
 2. Here is a short lesson on Old Testament logistics:
 - a. Known as "The Book of the 12" in Hebrew Scriptures (or the Tanakh), the final 12 books in our Christian Old Testament are the 12 Minor Prophets, which begin with Daniel.
 - b. The last 4 books include 2 books which begin with the letter "Z."
 - c. Going backwards, at the end is Malachi.
 - (1) Before him comes Zechariah.
 - (2) The third to last book is Haggai,
 - (3) and before that is Zephaniah:
 - (4) Our Final Four then: Zephaniah, Haggai, *Zechariah*, Malachi.

- III. ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 12 IS AN ORACLE OF THE COMING MESSIAH, WHO IS TO BE A NEW KING WHO SHALL SIT ON THE THRONE OF DAVID.
 - A. ***In the first part of his vision he makes a prophecy about three symbols which also became important in Jesus' last days: a cup or bowl, a heavy stone and a flaming torch.***
 1. The cup, or bowl held in the hand to drink from may be broken or bruised.
 - a. It is a stumbling block and causes the people of Jerusalem to reel from drunkenness.
 - b. Judah is actually the cup or bowl which becomes a traitor to the holy

- city, but YHWH the LORD will be the city's defense.
2. In verse 3, the nations around Jerusalem shall see a heavy stone and try to remove it and take it with them.
 - a. They will injure their backs, tear their muscles and arms, loosen their joints.
 - b. They will go to neurosurgeons, get spinal blocks, prescriptions for physical therapy, but nothing can be done to heal them!
 - c. Zechariah predicts that "*In tearing, he/the Messiah will be torn.*"
 - d. The stone represents the heavy burden of taxation against the holy city and the poorest of her inhabitants.
 3. Third, a hearth of fire is promised, or a flaming torch and it will reduce Judah and Jerusalem's enemies to kindling and stubble as a flaming fire out of control shall consume all the wood of the forest.
 - a. The prophet here envisions "*the secret power of the Spirit and the favor of God.*"
 - b. God shall renew his sanctuary and through it save the world.
- B. ***Each of these 3 powerful images are pivotal in the Passion.***
1. The cup at our Lord's table:
 - a. Jesus asked James and John and us also, "*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with my baptism?*" (Mark 10:38ff)
 - b. Jesus promises they shall drink from his bitter cup; but they shall not have the place of honor or lord it over others.
 2. A heavy stone was placed at the entrance of Jesus' tomb. How it was removed we do not know, unless by the power of God's Spirit.
 - a. Paul tells us that Christ's resurrection is "*a stone God is laying in Zion which will make men and women stumble*" (Romans 10:33).
 - b. And the heavy taxation was on Jesus' list of grievances.
 3. Third, the cauldron of fire or the flaming torch:
 - a. Jesus who wept over Jerusalem "*because you do not know the things that make for peace,*" likewise warned, "*I came to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!*" (Luke 12:49).
 - b. A reference to his baptism, his death and the cost of discipleship.
 - c. He was arrested in the night by stealth, tried by a lynch mob by the light of the torches and fire.
- C. ***And finally in verse 12, this coming Messiah, Son of David, who shall renew the throne and the kingdom of glory before all the nations, must be pierced in his side, and "rejected of men."***
1. In death he will be mourned as an only child or a first-born.
 2. In the Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 53 we read that same prophecy.
 3. I want to point out that in the last part of this 12th chapter we have moved into what is called the spiritual dimension of the oracle."
 4. Zechariah has an overwhelming sense of the presence and vitality of God's Spirit and "*the Lord of hosts*" from the first words of this chapter.
- IV.** This section and the spiritual dimension concludes with Zechariah 13:1, where a fourth image is the fountain to be opened for the worshipers at the temple.
- A. ***In the rebuilt Temple there was no source of fresh water***
1. The people must bring their own containers of water for cleansing.
 2. Throughout this oracle ... and what is an oracle? (page 2)

- a. Today we use the word oracle in computer talk to mean a database, a source for innovative and imaginative software.
- b. The ancient meaning is not so different. It was a person of vision or wisdom, gifted by the gods/or by YHWH, with a picture or knowledge of the future.
3. Christ in John 7 is at the Temple for the Festival of Booths, or the Ingathering of the first harvest.
 - a. The question is raised about his being the Messiah.
 - b. Jesus makes a prophecy about the Spirit which has not yet been given: "*If any one is thirsty (for the Spirit), let him come to me and drink... Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.*"
 - c. The reference is to prophetic statements by Isaiah, Joel and here.
4. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well about a drink of living water, but which will not come from worship in the Temple, for he shall replace the Temple.
 - a. "*On that day*" people will worship in Spirit and in truth.

B. ***The pre-requisite for all of these miraculous events, however, is paramount: God's uncompromising demand for repentance by ALL who want to rebuild the holy city, the walls, and the Temple, exiles and current residents together.***

1. God will not restore the kingdom or send the Messiah unless first the people of the house of David
 - a. come to God with supplication,
 - b. have a spirit of compassion,
 - c. and mourn over their sins as one weeps over their first-born.
2. Only "*on that day*" shall the people have strength through the all-powerful and sovereign, "*the LORD of hosts their God*":
 - a. Then I will pour out my Spirit upon them in Jerusalem
3. It would be difficult to ask the Catholic people of St. John Vianney Church to confess, be forgiven of their sins, but that is what Good Friday implies.
 - a. Their anger and their spirit of forgiveness for the arsonists perhaps?
5. Says one commentator on Zechariah, "It is a picture of penitence as vivid and accurate as any found anywhere in Scripture.
 - a. Another powerful image of how repentance changes a whole people is that of Ninevah after the preaching of Jonah.
6. The sin Zechariah says God despises the most is the sin of indifference and "base ingratitude."
7. When you have a new pastor here, some of the families who left will return, maybe only for a Sunday or two, maybe longer. The ones who come back to stay will expect the church to be as it was in 2009. However, they will find a renewed church with peace and vitality.
 - a. Some will have an attitude of indifference or ingratitude for the changes. They will expect you to be grateful just to have them back!
 - b. Where does repentance play a role for those who come back?
 - c. Our Session retains a number of people on an inactive list.
 - (i) We cannot decide what that means, what our responsibility is to these indifferent members, what we expect from them.
 - (ii) Repentance and reconciliation is most likely not on our list!
5. In Revelation, 4 of the 7 churches are praised for their hard work, for their patience, for their suffering. But what God has against them each is that they have refused to repent!
 - a. Each guardian angel is told that the church cannot receive a new

- C. **Jesus' demands and expectations of the lost house of Israel was virtually identical to Zechariah's.**
1. He saw them as God's chosen people of privilege and responsibility who rejected God, who became complacent and lukewarm.
 2. When David's son Absalom declared himself king in Jerusalem and forced his father out, David responded by riding through the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey. To him it was a sign that his people had rejected him as their king and likewise their God.

- a. That is why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.
 - b. not as a triumphant symbol, but as a symbol of rejection.
3. Of course Christ's kingdom will only be spiritual. And the new Jerusalem will be his resurrection kingdom.
- a. The fountain of water in the temple will be the gift of everlasting life through the Holy Spirit.

4. *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!*

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

*Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding ...on a colt*

...On that day the LORD their God will save them..." (Zechariah 9:9. 16)

(page 4)

Now may all of God's humble & repentant people say, "Amen!"