**A Cleansing Fountain**

**Zechariah 13 (ESV)**

November 28, 2021

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We’re following Jesus together. We just sang His praises and we prayed in His Name. We’re going to share in His love together and we’re going to listen to His Word and then go forth and follow and share that Word with others. We’re reading His Word from the Book of Zechariah. He is one of the prophets that God sent thousands of years ago, before Jesus came, prophesying about the coming Christ, the Messiah who is Jesus. We’re near the end of the book, in Zechariah chapter 13. We’re right at the end. We’ll do one more chapter next week and then Pastor Ritch will summarize the book for us as we enter the Christmas season.

Chapters 12 and 13 are connected and they’re part of the same final burden message that Zechariah has. Last week, there was this big battle and then Israel saw that there was one who was pierced and they grieved and mourned over this one. So everyone went grieving and mourning. That’s where we find ourselves right at the beginning of chapter 13. So if you would, out of respect for God’s Word, stand and we’ll read chapter 13 together. Everyone is grieving by themselves and now we enter chapter 13.

***1*** *“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.*

***2*** *“And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.* ***3*** *And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.’ And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies.*

***4*** *“On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive,* ***5*** *but he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.’* ***6*** *And if one asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your back?’ he will say, ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends.’*

***7*** *“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.* ***8*** *In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.* ***9*** *And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, “The LORD is my God.’”*

It was a huge mess! A big mess! At the time, my brother was just a little guy. He had gone into the room against the rules and took the toy chest and dumped it over. All the pieces scattered throughout the room. He was old enough to know it was his job to clean it up, but too young to do it without getting completely overwhelmed. If I remember correctly, we were going to watch a movie as a family and my dad had said, “You need to clean it up before you can join us.” The mess was so huge that my dad was sure he was just going to get overwhelmed and ask for help. So he leaves him, but the room is quiet for a while. Dad keeps asking, “Are you still cleaning up?” We would hear a little squeak, “Yup!” After a while, Dad goes back to the room and he discovers that instead of being overwhelmed and asking for help, my brother has been playing in the mess the entire time. He hadn’t picked up a thing. Dad’s sudden arrival so shocks my little brother that he just jumps into action and he starts throwing things into the toy chest. He starts singing my dad’s favorite song, “Clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere.” (Laughter!) The whole situation shows how far my brother was separated from us by a mess that he hadn’t even realized was beyond his ability to clean up.

We’re all pretty good at making messes that extend to practically every area of our lives. We make messes of our possessions, our finances, our health, of our relationships, of our community, and messes of our own character. We make messes that just like those Christmas lights you might be getting into, we try to untangle and we just make it worse. Maybe this season when you’re getting back together with family, you start to revisit some of those messes and realize how tangled up and deep those wounds really are. I’m not sure what you’re going through this week, what God would be bringing to your own mind, but there are big messes. These are messes that are sometimes easily made, but are beyond our ability to clean up.

We think often we can fix whatever we want whenever we want it, until we try. Then we realize that we’re not just short on time, we are in over our heads. We try to get one or two areas of concern cleaned up until we just face that this is an illusion of control just in the sheer magnitude of the mess everywhere, not only in our own lives but in our own family or small group or church or community or nation or generation. There are big messes. Only once you try to start to fix things do you realize that just because you can make a mess doesn’t mean you can clean it up.

Israel had a very big mess and it cost her. She was chosen as a nation especially by God, rescued from Egypt, given the law, promised a land, ensured God’s presence only as they kept His Word and they had failed. They had made a mess of it many times, generation after generation, king after king, priest after priest. So God kept His promise to discipline them and cast them from the land. He exiled them under the rule of Assyria, Persia, Babylon, yet not without a promise to bring them back in seventy years. It was a promise issued through Jeremiah, claimed by Daniel, experienced by Zechariah. This is an event in history, where the people of Israel returned to a land unheard of and they seek to rebuild the temple. They’re trying to restore what had been lost and it turned out to be far from easy. It had been rebuilt. It’s far from its former glory, though. So many Jews remained outside the land and the promises of God still seem out of reach. Foreign governments were still in power and God appears nowhere close.

The lingering question is what is it going to take? What’s it going to take to restore closeness with God? How do we deal with this mess such that we can restore closeness with God? The loss of closeness with God is not a question or a plight suffered by Israel alone. It’s a loss that all humanity has incurred. In Adam, we all once were close with God in Eden. Humanity was there, but in rebellion, we ourselves were cast out and exiled. Even now, we’re born craving closeness with our creator by design, but we are doomed to suffer separation throughout life on earth and then it is solidified in death. We are cut off from the source of life and love. That’s the tragedy of losing closeness with God. So the same question plaguing them is what is faced in some measure by us all. What is it going to take? What’s it going to take to restore closeness with God? The answer is not actually as complicated as you might imagine. It’s simple. We just have to cleanse ourselves from all sin. What does it take to restore closeness with God? It’s just cleansing. You have to be cleansed. The mess must be cleaned up. It kind of reminds us of the opening call of Zechariah, doesn’t it? Right at the beginning, the call is to return to God, turn back. Turn from your sin. That word we hear often is repent. It was issued by so many prophets over and over and over. Repent. Turn from your sin. Turn to God. You have to turn to Him in faith, trusting Him to do what you cannot.

What’s it going to take to restore closeness with God? It’s going to take a cleansing performed by God Himself because the mess that we’ve made is beyond our ability to clean up. We are in over our heads. That’s what we see in chapter 13. You could say it like this. Here is your point for today. True closeness with God requires a true cleansing by God. This is something that we cannot do. Only God can. This kind of cleansing is actually exactly what Zechariah foresees. It’s a cleansing that God gives him and he shares with us through this vision the hope that they and we need. The kind of cleansing that we require is so overwhelming that it begs us to ask how could that ever happen? How does that kind of cleansing ever come about and clean up the kind of mess that we are in? Is there really hope that closeness with God can be restored? What kind of cleansing could actually do that? If there was one, how would we respond to it? Here are four thoughts we’ll work through on this cleansing this morning. The first about this cleansing is that we can soak in it because

**There’s Nothing Like It—This cleansing is special (13:1)**

In chapter 12, Zechariah began unpacking the last of those two oracles. Remember the burdens, the messages that he had? This is the last and it predicts this future war that ends with Israel being rescued. This final image is carried over into chapter 13. There is this great mourning, grief, sorrow. It’s a nation filled with weeping because they see someone who was pierced. It says

**Zechariah 12:10** …when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced,

This individual is related with God, but yet how can you pierce God? What’s going on? They’re looking and they’re seeing someone identified with God that is pierced and it brings them to deep grief, to national mourning. They realize something is terribly wrong and they feel that sorrow deeply in their souls. They’re in over their heads and they need the mercy of God’s help, desperately. That exactly is the day that something happens.

***1*** *“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.*

This is a special fountain of cleansing opening for this nation. It’s a very special, unique moment of cleansing. Sometimes to appreciate the specialness of the cleansing, we have to remember how badly some things need to be cleaned. I’ve had a few nasal surgeries and they kind of affect my ability to smell. So especially during my years of playing sports, there were times when I didn’t quite realize the potency of my odor. I had an aura that created distance between me and other people. (Laughter!) I had a kind mom and some others who would speak into my life. So powerful was the aura that people would avoid even being near objects that I had sat on. I needed to learn and have people teach me the distancing effect that my lack of cleanness was causing between me and others.

A good cleansing usually took care of the problem, but there are some stenches that seem beyond human ability to resolve. I remember actually just down the hall in the senior high room, there was this plastic tub. It was in a corner. You know how it happens in a multi-purpose room. Sometimes a tub just sits there for a while. We were cleaning up and I opened that bin to see what was inside and the smell hit me. I actually can’t smell well and I felt the presence. (Laughter!) It had been filled with supplies from this outdoor water game stuffed in the bin. It had been there over a year and what had come to life within was wretched. (Laughter!) It was so sickening that the only thing we could do was throw it away. There was no cleansing available. Some messes seem beyond any human ability to clean up and that’s what we have here. It’s a mess that needs true cleansing desperately. It’s a kind of cleansing so unique and so special that it can only come from God. There are a few observations about this cleansing. You look at when it happens, the timing. It’s exactly when God wants.

***1*** *“On that day*

This phrase has been mentioned several times. The war has come. Israel is being rescued. They’ve seen and they’re in mourning over this one that was pierced, this one associated with God, this future day that they’re anticipating. They’re in deep mourning. This one who has been pierced, that idea of pierced is executed. Someone has been killed and they’re overwhelmed.

What we studied last week is to realize this pierced one was actually the very Messiah that they had been anticipating. The very king that they were awaiting was the king that they themselves rejected and then was pierced. So of all the messes, of all of the mistakes, could there be any one more overwhelming? The source of life, the hope of salvation, the child promised to save humanity, from the very first couple in their exile from Eden, the heart of Christmas, the nation’s only perfect prophet, priest, king, that they would reject Him and have Him executed by the Gentiles like a criminal. It’s only on this day. They’re rescued from annihilation when this Messiah resurrected, returns to conquer their enemies. They realize what has happened and the grief is understandably overwhelming. What have we done? That’s when this cleansing comes about. A spirit of grace, you remember that spirit from last week, pours out over them. They’re weeping and they cry out for mercy, so they receive mercy.

*there shall be a fountain opened for the house*

What happens is that a fountain opens and the source here is not shared. It just opens. So the clear assumption is that this source is God. It is a supernatural gift, this fountain that bursts forth on cue. It’s not manmade. The image brings you back to the picture of Eden, when there were fountains flowing out and this idea of life within the garden, this restoring cleansing fountain from God. You can’t help but notice what it offers, the supply. The idea there is that this fountain is perpetual. The supply is continual. It’s not like a river that could dry up in a drought or the rain would cease. No, this is a fountain that is bubbling constantly, perpetually flowing. It’s opened and remains open, this fountain from God, this fountain of cleansing. Look at who it’s for, the target, here. It’s for Israel.

*of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,*

This cleansing that Zechariah foresees is a national cleansing that is offered. You see the two impacted groups, the dynasty of David and then the citizenry of Jerusalem. It’s David’s house, his descendants and all the nation, both. Look at how this cleansing works, the effect. It does what God wants. It cleanses the impossible. It will cleanse them from two areas. You could say in a sense, kind of the inside and the outside.

*to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.*

So this perpetual fountain that shows up right on time comes from God supernaturally overflowing into the nation and is washing them from sin and uncleanness. Sin being the things that they had done wrong, missing the mark of God’s standard; uncleanness being the defilement caused by sin.

Without going too deep back into the law and ritual, there was a difference between the internal and external effects of the fall. There is that judicial or moral penalty for disobedience, the guilt of doing something that was not right. But there is also the relational or ritual impurity because of defilement at not doing something that was pleasing to God. So there is a distance, a separation between fallen man and a God who is holy, holy, holy. The Old Testament temple had both the blood of sacrifice to cover that judicial guilt but then also had the water of purification to take care of that uncleanness, both the blood and the water. But here is a fountain, a new fountain that is a cleansing from God, able to wash away both. It’s a fountain unlike any other. This is the kind of cleansing that can only come from God. This kind of true cleansing by God is what must take place if we’re to enjoy true closeness with Him because God can cleanse what no one else can.

It’s not uncommon for people going through trauma or people who are really wrestling with guilt to try to wash away those feelings with excessive hand washing or trying to take lots of showers to try to cleanse themselves. But there are some things that humans can never wash away and guilt is one of them. The guilt of sin brings the penalty of death. It is guilt born by all in the line of Adam. We sin. That sin separates us from God and it prevents closeness. Israel experienced this in profound ways to the point of being exiled out of the land to show the degree of separation. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God accused the people of committing such a sin that they had forsaken God. He said

**Jeremiah 2:13** …they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

These basins that try to catch water, but they are broken. They can’t hold any water. “They think they’re going to get life there, and they have forsaken me, the source of living water.” They were so cut off from God, they were so dead to God and they had given up on relationship such that God says their hearts are like hearts of stone. There is not even a possibility of relationship, so they are exiled out of the land as a result. But here’s the thing. God can cleanse what no one else can. He promised through Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 36, He prophesied and said

**Ezekiel 36:24** I will take you from all the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

This is unheard of for any other nation. God is going to bring them back and

**Ezekiel 36:25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

This is not just the outside.

**Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I’m going to cleanse you from the outside and the inside. God provides a salvation, a cleansing that is unlike any other. This is the God of salvation, who offers what He calls in Isaiah chapter 12, the wells of salvation, living water, a new heart. How does God do this? This is a salvation that comes through an ultimate sacrifice unlike the ones from before. It’s that God the Son would come as a man, that He would be the Anointed One, the Chosen One, the Christ, the Messiah. This Seed, He would be chosen to suffer in our place and it would be His perfect blood that would be shed for the forgiveness of sins. That’s what God would make clear through the author to the Hebrews. The Messiah we now know to be Jesus, He was the ultimate sacrifice for God’s people. Because of His death on the cross, those who trust Him, who place their faith in Him, say, “Yes, this is the way. God, help me.” They can,

**Hebrews 10:22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water.

This is the provision. God has made a cleansing unlike any other. This cleansing is so special. It is made possible through the death of Jesus and is available to all who would turn and trust in Him. This is an amazing cleansing!

But there is a controversial point here that is hard. We don’t have time to wrestle through it this morning. I think Pastor Ritch will circle back when we do an overview. But I can say this. What do the readers understand here about how this interacts with Israel? They would have rightly understood Him I think to mean, ethnic Israel. This was the nation who rejected the Messiah, would one day be rescued by Him, this one who was pierced. They would mourn over Him in repentance and then their hardened hearts would be broken by a spirit of grace poured out. They would call for mercy and then the flood of God’s cleansing would wash over them. This is what is described in Jeremiah chapter 31 and in Romans chapter 11. The nation will realize what they’ve done, the mess that they have made, that they have given their own king to be executed by the Gentiles, and this mistake would overwhelm them. They would say, is it possible to be cleansed of such sin?

You remember that scene, right? The Jews wanted to kill Jesus. Pilate is the Gentile judge and he says, “Why? What evil has he done?” They shouted, “Let him be crucified!” Pilate sees he is not gaining anything and a riot is starting. He takes water and washes his hands and he says, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. See to it yourself.” On an outside level, you cannot wash away guilt. The people answered, “His blood be on us and our children.” Everyone was guilty. No one could wash away that kind of guilt. Neither of them could.

One of the most powerful examples is given just a short time after Jesus’ execution. There was a man named Saul who is zealously persecuting any followers of Jesus. He supports the execution of one. He is after persecuting these followers. Yet God miraculously opens his eyes and chooses to save him. All of a sudden he recognizes Jesus is the Messiah and he says, “We need to get this message out. We need to get this to all of my countrymen.” He goes to the Jews and he starts sharing, trying to bring hope to them. He gets tremendous persecution from them. He is rejected. He acknowledges in Romans that there is a time of hardening, here. He realizes a veil lies over their hearts. They’re not seeing what is happening. But he clings to the hope that there is a future day when their eyes will be opened. I believe this is the day prophesied by Zechariah here that this is the day they realize, “Whoa! What have we done?” I don’t know if you’ve ever hit that moment in your life where you realize, “What have I done?” You realize there is a guilt on your hands that you could never wash away. This is where the people are. They are mourning in grief. “What have we done?”

This is when the fountain of cleansing opens. It opens to people who are ready to mourn and grieve and to turn to God from their sin. The promise from Zechariah remains true. You return to me and I’ll return to you. Turn from your sin and the fountain floods forth. There is no provision like Jesus. There is no cleansing like His. Do you think you have a sin beyond God’s reach? There is nothing else like this cleansing. God says no way. Paul says, “I persecuted Jesus’ followers and was even part of the execution of Stephen. God saved me on purpose to show He can cleanse and rescue anybody.” Do not believe the lie that you are beyond God’s reach. This is a cleansing unlike any other. Soak in this. There is nothing like it. Jesus can rescue, but it doesn’t mean it’s all fun and games. This is a cleansing that we need to take seriously because this cleansing is special and it is also total.

**It’s No Joke—This cleansing is total (13:2-6)**

This isn’t something to play around with. You see how this cleansing, or you could call it even a purge, unfolds in a world that is filled with sin and mess. As this purge unfolds and the cleansing is unleashed and there is a total cleansing that takes place, God takes sin very seriously. That’s what we find in verses 2-6. It’s a cleansing that washes them not only clean from defilement, but it purges the land of deception. It’s the removal of the false worship. Gone are the idols, the false prophets, even the demons that were behind them. This is an absolute total cleansing.

There was a time when our kids were playing with their food. Mom is working hard making the meals and they’re playing with it, tossing it. We just kind of hit a point where I said, “We’re going to institute a policy. It’s called the zero-tolerance policy.” It was pretty simple. It was kind of a joke, but kind of serious. If you play with your food, then you lose your plate for a bit and you’re just going to have to wait before you can start eating again. So it was a zero-tolerance policy. We had a three-year old and we’d be eating with other people and she’d tell them, “Zero-tolerance policy.” (Laughter!) We followed it somewhat for a time, but it was kind of silly sometimes. When they would say it, they would get so cute. You get kind of soft on your kids. Now, that’s not what is going on here. This is an actual zero-tolerance policy. This is deadly serious. You see the purge that happens through this cleansing. It’s a purge that is brought about by God. It’s brought about by God’s people, and even by the hypothetical pseudo-prophets themselves. This deception is purged, cleansed from the land. You can see first how it’s purged by God.

***2*** *“And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts,*

This is the God of angel armies who could destroy. He says

*I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.*

He purges the land from the dimmest memory of idolatry. So there is no memory of it. He means business. He’s going to cut off the names. That word “cut off” is the same word that is used often of cutting a covenant, of making a promise, cutting a deal where they would cut an animal, walk through, and say, “If I break this promise, may God do this to me.” They would cut a covenant. God here instead keeps His promise by cutting off the idols and separating them from the land. But He cuts off, specifically it says, the names of idols.

Idols, in the end, they’re just stone. They’re just some kind of figure. They’re not really anything in themselves, but the names are sort of the entities and the demonic influences behind them and all of the desires that people place upon them, associated with them. God is going to cut it off, disassociate them so much that they’re just stones. They are nothing anymore. They’re powerless. The dimmest memory is cut off. It’s like what he promises in Micah chapter 5.

Those names are all gone and there is only one name remaining, the name above every other name, the God who saves, who we know to be Jesus. God doesn’t share His glory. There is only one who we realize is the true image of the invisible God. He is the one who God is not afraid to share His glory because He is God. That’s why He can say in

**Isaiah 44:6** Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

This is the only way that God can keep that first commandment that there is no other god before Him, and yet also provide a way of cleansing. It’s through Jesus. But He is going to purge the land of the dimmest memory of idolatry and of any slight advocacy for deceit. He says in verse 2,

*And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.*

So those pseudo-prophets are going to be gone and the spirit of uncleanness. That word “the” is referred to several times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, as far as I’m aware, this is the only time “the spirit of uncleanness” is referenced. It’s some specific deceptive spirit that is energizing and advancing this haunting, lingering deception and it is gone completely. It’s almost like back to Eden, but without the satanic influence. There is this cleansing where that’s all gone. Now, there is a context I think where this is taking place, and I don’t think that this is ultimately heaven, where it lasts forever. This is something unique that is going on. But it’s a cleansing that God says is going to be total. I’m going to purge of the dimmest memory of idolatry, the slightest advocacy of deceit, and it’s going to be purged not only by God, but by the people. It’s going to be purged with the faintest leniency for any of these lies. They’re not going to pity it at all, not even the littlest bit.

***3*** *And if anyone again prophesies,*

Hypothetically,

*his father and mother who bore him*

The ones who gave birth to him,

*will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.’*

Then they, the ones who gave birth to him, it’s emphasizing the closest family relationship. The person most likely to be sympathetic will have no pity.

*And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies.*

This is the same word “pierced” that was used in chapter 12. They will be the ones who pierce because this person is lying. This was what Israel was supposed to do back in Deuteronomy chapter 13 when they entered the land. They were supposed to take sin very seriously and even their own parents to destroy. Here is for real, the people consumed with zeal for God. They say, “We suffered lies against Jesus. Where the Messiah was betrayed, we suffered that before. Never again! Even if it’s my own child, never again! This is serious. It is a true zero-tolerance policy. They are zealous for Jesus that much. It reminds you of what Jesus says in

**Luke 14:26**-27 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

There has to be a readiness to follow God with such zeal that if anyone threatens that and would step in the way, that it would be considered as hatred. The same word is the one that brings back to mind that piercing of Numbers chapter 25. In Numbers 25, Israel had just engaged in false worship. So they had mixed, and now they’re worshiping Baal. There was confusion and then God had sent a plague. So they were suffering the effects of this and they were stepping back and asking for God to rescue them. They were mourning and weeping, just like what we see here in Zechariah chapter 12. The whole nation was mourning and weeping. Then there is a couple who goes in and is in pagan intercourse of false worship in the face of God’s people right in the moment there. In zeal, Phineas goes and he pierces them together. That kind of zeal is the kind of zeal that God says the people will have at that time. They will have zero-tolerance for any kind of deception. It’s purged by God, by the people, and even by the false prophets themselves. It’s sort of hypothetical.

***4*** *“On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies.*

So if this were to take place, then this prophet

*He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive,* ***5*** *but he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.’*

The idea is that these guys who had been false teaching, they are going to suppress their evil even on their own and try to hide. I want to make sure that there is nothing left. They wouldn’t openly boast or continue. They would be embarrassed and ashamed. They wouldn’t be, you could say, a wolf in sheep’s clothing, anymore. This idea of a hairy garment is the idea of Elijah. You would wear this as sort of the garb or religious indication that I’m authentic. I’m a real deal. I’m a prophet from God.” They’re going to put that away. “I’m not going to pretend. I’m not going to put on a religious uniform anymore. That’s not me.” They’re going to give up their tricks and they’re going to try to hide. They’re going to pretend to be lowly field workers, servants from their youngest days. They don’t care, as long as they can just disappear. But it’s almost as if their disguise causes them to look unintentionally a bit like Cain from Genesis 3. They’ve taken that hairy garment, put it away, and it almost reminds you of Jacob, before he was Israel, when he had put on the hairy garment. That word hairy is only used of Esau, so it brings to mind the sort of trickster who is trying to get rid of his stuff. “I’m just a worker here.”

***6*** *And if one asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your back?’*

The people come and they ask because as they’re working out in the field when it’s hot, they take off the outer garments and then there are some scars on these false prophets. They’re the kind of scars that the false teachers would have. Remember in 1 Kings chapter 18, when Elijah was with the prophets of Baal and they were trying to worship and appease this false god? They would cut themselves in this false worship to try to bleed themselves.

**1 Kings 18:28** And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances , until the blood gushed out upon them.

They would wound themselves to try to appease these false gods. The scars there stand out. So they’re like, “Hey, guy who has been worker of the field. What are these wounds?”

*he will say, ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends.’*

It’s hard to know exactly what the excuse here is intended to mean. I looked into it a decent bit and it’s just tough. But it could be either an admission of some sort of past religious life or a claim of some kind of drunken brawl. But whatever the case, the point is that the excuse is pathetic. They’re desperate to purge themselves of the stigma and they want to just be rid of it. They’re using any kind of pathetic excuse they can just to get people away from them and say, “No false prophecy here.” The idea is that this cleanse is total. Everybody is trying to get rid of it; God, the people, even the false prophets. They all realize this: God takes sin seriously. For God to be close, the cleansing must be total.

The question for this section is has this day come? Has the land experienced that kind of cleansing, where there is the total removal of the idols and the false teaching? I don’t believe so. If you go to Israel, you’ll see all kinds of shrines throughout the land. There has been a rejection of some forms of idolatry, but we know that there and around the world there is all kinds of false teaching and lies. There are the lies of self-worship that are all over our own culture and media. There are the lies of a gospel that would be a prosperity gospel, a false gospel that would say God wants you to get rich and that obscures our need for a Savior. There are all kinds of people even throughout our own community, whether it would be a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon or Scientologist, they are moving throughout the neighborhoods, trying to share news that does not point people to the true Jesus. There are movements all around our nation and around the world that are leading people to eternal destruction. It’s no surprise because God says in

**1 Timothy 4:1** …in the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

Paul warns in

**Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

God says, watch out! This kind of deception will be at work. It’s described I think by Daniel in Daniel 9:11, a day referenced by Jesus in Matthew 24, by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, by John in Revelation 13. All this that we don’t have time to go into, there is a time when the deception builds before this total cleansing, such that even Israel is led astray. This is the time we’re in, moving towards that. Don’t be mistaken. That cleansing will come and it will be total. God will take sin seriously. That time has not yet come. What is offered to us is a cleansing now, but the same God who is close then is the same God that we know in Jesus now. He is a God who takes sin seriously. He wants us, His church to be clean. He is purifying us. We see the truth of that seriousness in the death of Ananias and Sapphira. We see the truth of that seriousness about Jesus when He speaks to the churches in Revelation. We see the call to turn from sin and repent. Now here is the blessing.

**1 John 1:5** …God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

**1 John 1:8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But here’s the promise.

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He wants us to enjoy closeness. He wants us to be close. But we have to recognize He takes sin seriously. Do we have sin that we think is beneath God’s notice? Even now, God might be bringing something to mind as He does even in my own heart. God calls us to take it seriously. The seriousness of this cleansing doesn’t stop here. It is a cleansing that is special. It is total and because of that, it’s going to be painful. When you look at this cleansing of God, don’t be fooled.

**It Doesn’t Come Easy—This cleansing is painful (13:7-9a)**

What it costs for this cleansing to come about, we’ll look at three different pains that he references. The first is the pain of a punishment. He calls it a strange punishment because after the pathetic excuses of these pseudo-leaders, we’re kind of expecting that they’re going to get pierced. They’re going to get killed, executed for what they’ve done. Zechariah takes a turn here and he surprises us. Instead of them being executed, the first words in verse 7 are

***7*** *“Awake, O sword,*

You think of these guys and their pathetic excuse. It’s “bring the sword,” and yet it’s the sword of judgment, this divine justice through execution. The figure here that is executed is someone else. He says

***7*** *“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the LORD of hosts.*

This is someone that we wouldn’t expect, someone who is a peer or an associate of God’s, His shepherd. The idea there is someone who is associated with Him or even equal to Him, His peer, the man who stands next to Him. Some might say they think that’s the false shepherd, but I think that the clear idea here is that “my shepherd, the man who stands next to me” is the same idea as what God says when He calls someone my servant in Isaiah 53

**Isaiah 53:3** He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

You can hear the emotional resonance of chapter 12, here.

**Isaiah 53:3-5** …and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

In fact, do you know what this makes me think of? He says

**Isaiah 53:6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He is the one who took our place. This is a strange punishment that is issued. The judicial punishment that was supposed to fall upon sinful sheep is instead absorbed by a Shepherd Savior. There is no shepherd more good than that. This shepherd who almost appears to be God’s friend or equal, how does that work? Well, it’s not surprising. In John chapter 10, Jesus says

**John 10:11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

**John 10:14-15** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

He says in fact that His sheep hear his voice. They know him. They follow him. He gives eternal life. And he says,

**John 10:30** I and the Father are one.

He is closely associated with the Father. He is the shepherd. Here is what He is saying and that’s why the Jews at that moment hear what He is saying and they want to kill Him. They reject Him. The strange punishment that is issued by God is against His own Shepherd. It’s shocking! That’s painful. That is what is required for this cleansing. But then also we see the pain of a tragic persecution. In verse 7, the shepherd is struck.

*“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.*

So the sheep flee and scatter. That’s what Jesus quotes in Matthew chapter 26 and Mark 14, right before He is about to be betrayed. He says, “You will all fall away from me this night because it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. What is so shocking is that Peter, who claims to be ready to kill for Jesus in zeal, “I’m going to fight for you. I’m going to kill for you and we’re going to bring in the kingdom.” He ends up fleeing like a lost lamb and he acts more like the false prophets who go into hiding. He pretends like he doesn’t know Jesus, and a persecution falls on the people. So this is a hard pain, the persecution that unfolds. There is also a painful expectation of purification for the nation. There is purification into a remnant. God says

***8*** *In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.*

This is the remnant. They will be purified and refined.

***9*** *And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.*

Ezekiel prophesies about that. There is more that we could get into, but we’ll have to leave that for now. There is a purification. There is a persecution. There is a punishment. All of this shows that true closeness with God requires a true cleansing by God and it is a costly, painful cleansing. So we dare not be fooled. It doesn’t come easy. It didn’t come cheap. This is the priceless blood of Jesus that was spilled to purchase us. We dare not take that lightly. Recognize that when Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to follow Him into a painful path, into persecution. He says

**John 15:20** Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Paul said through many trials and tribulations we’re going to enter the kingdom of God. He says

**2 Timothy 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

That’s how it’s going to be. It’s going to be hard. It’s going to be painful. There is no way to handle your sin apart from God’s plan. This is the path. Our hope in the path is that Jesus says

**John 16:33** …In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

It’s a painful path. It’s a costly path, but it is the path of hope. It’s the path to which we’re called through Jesus to overcome. The resounding refrain in Revelation is to overcome. He says to pick up your cross and follow me. It may not be martyrdom, but you will have to die to yourself to trust in Jesus. It’s going to be painful. So then why do it? Here’s the last thought.

**It’s Totally Worth It—This cleansing is wonderful (13:9b)**

It’s full of wonder! It is marvelous! It is awesome in every way that you can imagine. Here’s what we find in the last phrase of verse 9.

*They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, “The LORD is my God.’”*

Here there are two wonders that stand out. The first is the wonder of rescue. The second is the wonder of closeness. You see the rescue.

*They will call upon my name, and I will answer them.*

That idea of calling on the name should remind you back to when everyone was exiled out and people were dying in Genesis chapter 4. There was death after death after death, and then finally, they begin to call on the name of the Lord. There is a time when they cry out to be rescued, to be saved. It’s the same term used in

**Joel 2:32** And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved

That’s issued again in the New Testament. Call on His name and you’ll be rescued from the wrath of God, rescued into eternal home. This is a wonder to behold. This is a cleansing that is offered in Jesus. The rescue brings us into a closeness. We’re cleansed fully and he says

*I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, “The LORD is my God.’”*

Now, this phrase, I wish we had time to unpack all the ways that it unfolds throughout Scripture, but one of the most precious is in the book of Hosea where the prophet was told to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him and have three children. These children would be given symbolic names; names that meant Scattered, names that meant Not Loved or Not Pitied and names that meant Not My People. But then after things are restored, the names are changed. From scattered moves to planted. The child is renamed from not loved to loved or pitied. The child is renamed from not my people to my people. Through that symbol that everyone was watching unfold in real life, seeing these kids and these names and then Hosea was able to say on behalf of God

**Hosea 2:23** …I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

The distance and separation, this gap will be closed. There will be closeness once again. So we’ll be able to say perhaps most simply, maybe Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. That is a wonder. All those who trust in Jesus can join His flock. There will come a day after all this persecution and then in the purification of Israel that His people return to Him and He will rescue them tenderly as only a good shepherd can. But from this standpoint, we can just say closeness with God requires a cleansing by God and true closeness is totally worth it. Nothing beats closeness with God! It’s wonderful! Do not settle for anything less.

There are a number of preachers who have used this story. It’s a true story so far as it is recounted, that I think helps us as we think about this passage. This man who was in England in the early 1700’s, his mom died when he was six. He said every day he would mourn his mother’s death. So he studied law, and when it came time for his final before the bar, it frightened him so bad that he had a mental breakdown and he even tried to take his own life. So later on, he is placed in an insane asylum for eighteen months or so. It’s there and in relationship with somebody, he ends up reading the book of Romans, about Jesus. He realizes, “I can have a relationship with God through this Christ and I can be forgiven.” So he is converted, and he goes on to write hymns. He was trying to put to poetry and to song what he had experienced in the good news of Jesus and relationship with Him. He teamed up with John Newton. You know him. He was a former slave trader who wrote *Amazing Grace*. This guy, William Cowper, wrote a hymn that was taken right here from Zechariah chapter 13. Do you know what the title was called?

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

There is a lot to think about in that passage. The cleansing is offered in Christ. The call is for us to turn from our sin because God will one day return to cleanse His people. When the King does return, there will be no place to hide. That’s where chapter 14 will take us next week in the final victory to come.