

Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
14 January 2018

Vision 1: A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Zechariah 1:7-17 (KJV) ⁷ Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which *is* the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, ⁸ I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white. ⁹ Then said I, O my lord, what *are* these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these *be*. ¹⁰ And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These *are they* whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. ¹¹ And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. ¹² Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? ¹³ And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me *with good words and comfortable words*. ¹⁴ So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. ¹⁵ And I am very sore displeased with the heathen *that are* at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. ¹⁶ Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION

Here begins the first of a series of 8 night visions. They are like windows that let in light to an otherwise dark house. The returnees, tasked with the rebuilding of the second Temple were a discouraged lot. In their darkness, God had to show them some light to encourage them to arise and build. It is perhaps for this reason the night visions were given. Zechariah testified, *"I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white"* (Zech. 1:8).

(1) HIS ABIDING PRESENCE

⁷ Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which *is* the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, ⁸ I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white. ⁹ Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these *be*. ¹⁰ And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. ¹¹ And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

The interpreting angel explained to Zechariah that the man riding upon a red horse is the *"angel of the LORD"* (v 11). This is the pre-incarnate Christ, the second person of the Trinity, before He was manifested in the flesh, the great Head of the Church. The myrtle tree is prized for its fragrant leaves. Its leaves give the richest fragrant odour only when bruised or crushed. This is a picture of the persecuted returnees, a small remnant of nearly 50,000 returning to Jerusalem surrounded by massive, hostile enemies. Even the insignificant group of Samaritans in the north became a really potent force to resist the returnees in their

rebuilding project. This vision is a symbolic picture of Christ in the midst of His children in all their afflictions. Notice the myrtle trees that were at the bottom of the valley signifying the lowly state of Israel. Christ standing among the myrtle tree signifies His presence with them in their distresses.

Remember Jesus said to His disciples these comforting words before His ascension in Matthew 28:20, *"Lo, I am with you always."* Dearly beloved, are you in some kind of affliction and feel that you are at a low point in your life with problems so overwhelming? Remember this first vision. Jesus is with you! Fear not. Persevere on!

Only Jesus, only Jesus,
Only He can satisfy,
All my burdens are turned to blessings,
When I know the Lord is nigh.

What a beautiful picture of the abiding presence of our Lord dwelling with His people even when we are at the bottom of our lives. It is a picture of great comfort. Remember in Pilgrim's Progress, Christian arrived at a fire-place in a house where he saw a man pouring water constantly on the fire but it did not extinguish? He was brought to the back of the fire-place in another room. There he saw a man pouring oil to keep the flickering fire aflame. The interpreter explained to Christian that the man pouring oil is Jesus Christ. He is the one that pours the oil of grace to keep the heart of faith aflame always even though Satan, the man in front of the fire-place keeps pouring water. Jesus is at the back of the fire-place, He may not be visible to us in our affliction, but He is there sustaining us by His grace! The angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle trees may not be fully visible yet there is no doubt that He is there.

¹² *Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?*

Christ abides with us even in our sufferings. He will yet deliver us from our current impasse. It is far from the truth that God hears not the cry of His children. We observe that the angel of the Lord rides a red horse. Why red? It signifies bloodshed and calamity. Hear carefully the words of the angel of the Lord speaking to the Lord of hosts in verse 12, *"Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?"* The second person of the Godhead pleading with the first person, God the Father, to show mercy on His children! This is the role of Jesus as our great high priest at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 8:1). Jesus fulfilled that intercessory role in the Old Testament as the pre-incarnate Christ. Will not God show mercy when His children cry out to Him for mercy? He certainly will deliver! Great is Your faithfulness! May You in Your mercy deliver me, dear Lord!

(2) GOD KNOWS OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

¹⁰ *And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.*

Zechariah saw that the other horses following the red horses were speckled and white, sent by the Lord to survey the earth, walking the length and breadth of it. Our Lord knows all things! We know that. Why does He then need to send His angels to survey the earth and report to Him the situation?

¹¹ *And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.*

The report is given in Zechariah 1:11 *“And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.”*

The nations of the earth seemed to be in a state of peace when God’s children are suffering! Does Jesus not care? Oh yes, He cares. He wants His children to understand that He does know and He cares about their predicament. The sending of the angels to survey the earth affirms that God is aware and He cares. He is not silent to the cry of His dear children! When the house doth sigh and weep, and the world is drowned in sleep, yet my Lord does not sleep, He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Let us be encouraged by the comforting truth from the words of the hymn “Does Jesus Care?”

*O yes, He cares – I know He cares!
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary,
The long nights dreary,
I know my Saviour cares.*

Jesus cares enough to be present with me. Renew me, Father, in knowledge of Your loving care.

God’s children have to learn what it means to trust in the Lord’s mercy. In Psalm 13, the psalmist sought His God because his current dire predicament has reached the point of desperation, he felt that he had been forgotten by His God.

Psalm 13:1-6 (KJV) ¹ *How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?* ² *How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?* ³ *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;* ⁴ *Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.* ⁵ *But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.* ⁶ *I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.*

Perhaps it is because of relationship problems, or perhaps it is because of sickness that threatens our life or those of our loved ones. Perhaps it is due to loss of a loved one, or prolonged job loss. Do we feel we are abandoned by God? This is the psalmist’s testimony in times of depression, the feeling is so real. Does God abandon His children? No! This is the lesson that God wants to teach His children. Psalm 13 is the prayer of the psalmist as he wrestled with His Lord to understand his predicament. He asked the Lord “How long” four times in Psalm 13:1- 2. He seemed to have reached the limit of his endurance. Alas, men ought always to pray and not to faint. The transition from sorrow (v 1-2) to supplication (v 3-4) and then to succour (v 5-6) requires the exercise of patience and faith. The psalmist learned to encourage himself in the Lord (1 Sam 30:6) through his personal experience. This is what every child of God learns – to appropriate help from His Word through prayer.

The prophet Zechariah saw in verse 12 the heavenly scene of great comfort, Jesus (the angel of the LORD) interceding on behalf of Israel with the Father (LORD of hosts) to show mercy to Israel. May we know that Jesus, our great high priest is interceding for us unceasingly in heaven at the right hand of the Father. What a glorious picture of hope for every depressed soul that we are not alone in our affliction. Alone yet never lonely!

Cast my burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain me. Keep my sight straight, Almighty God. Let me see only You in my life. Make me aware of Your presence every day, and never let me turn my eyes from You. Be the vision of my life. Amen.

(3) WORDS OF COMFORT

¹³ *And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words.*

God the Father is speaking here answering the interpreting angel, giving good words and comforting words. This should also exemplify us as ambassadors for Christ. We have a ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us. When we attend a vigil service, we are often lost for words to comfort the bereaved family. It is good to give them the Word of God.

For example, John 14:1, 27: *“The Lord Jesus Christ said, Let not your heart be troubled; Ye believe in God, believe also in Me. Peace I leave with you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* And also Psalm 23, the shepherd’s psalm.

Zechariah needed good and comforting words for his ministry. The angel’s message for Zechariah is that He has not forsaken them but is consistent in His care for them. He was angry with the nations that afflicted Israel. He will yet cause Jerusalem to prosper again (v 14-17).

We too need good and comforting words while we sojourn in this weary land. Certainly our security is not in the material things of life but in the gospel of life, for it is the power of God to uplift and to free every soul in bondage.

Many are in need of words of kindness and love from me. O Lord, bless my lips with praise and singing. Protect me from any unkindness I might inflict on another person. Help me to treat others as You would treat them. Amen.

(4) GOD’S JEALOUSY

¹⁴ *So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.* ¹⁵ *And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.* ¹⁶ *Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.*

Isaiah 42:13-14 (KJV) ¹³ *The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.* ¹⁴ *I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once.*

We often think that jealousy is a bad trait, something that is not a fruit of the spirit. When the Old Testament speaks of a jealous God, it is God’s way of expressing His love for His children. This is a declaration of God’s unfailing love for Israel. The intensity of that love and jealousy can be observed from the root verb in the Hebrew intensive Piel stem. It signifies the fierce determination of God to tolerate no rivalry whatsoever. The use of the phrase literally translated “I am jealous...with jealousy” provides the emphasis: “I am very jealous.”

God will not ever tolerate anything that will damage or distort that love relationship, based on the unilateral covenant relationship He made with Abraham (Gen 15:12-21). Anyone that undermines or distorts the relationship will face the wrath of God. Here, God is provoked to jealousy for His city, Jerusalem. This reaction results in His extending mercy to His people (Joel 2:18, Zech 8:2) – *“I am returned*

to Jerusalem with mercies” (v 16). God is fully aware of the worldwide oppression of the Jews and He will soon arise to take vengeance on their foes.

God will undertake to make right the wrongs done to His people. Have you any grievances? Bring them to Jesus. He is able to help! God is jealous of sharing His glory with another. Lord, help me to give all my heart to You.

(5) PROMISE OF FUTURE BLESSINGS

“Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.” (Zech. 1:16-17)

What a marvelous picture of the restored city of Jerusalem. It shall be prosperous again. God will not only comfort but fulfil His promise to yet choose to favour Jerusalem again. How does it apply to us? The Church of God shall yet triumph over every obstacle and vanquish every foe. This is the result of the intercessory prayer of the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, the Head of the Church, in verse 12.

The stretching of the line over the city had meant its destruction in 2 Kings 21:13. Israel had done wickedly to sin the sin of idolatry. When the iniquities of the Amorites were full, Israel was sent to destroy them. When Israel’s iniquity was full, Babylon was sent to destroy them. Now, after 70 years of captivity (God’s appointed period of chastisement), the returning remnant was given a new lease of life. Here, the line is the measuring line of the builders of the city.

The phrase *“be spread abroad”* is in the future tense in the plural from the Hebrew root verb meaning “to disperse,” “to scatter,” “to overflow,” describing abundant prosperity to come. We often equate prosperity with material blessings. It is beyond material blessings, it is peace and joy in the heart. What a glorious picture of hope for the discouraged and weak builders to pick up courage and to press on! Poor yet joyful! I am to seek true riches and true joy! Help me, Lord, to persevere in renewing my mind daily to conform to Your perfect image.