

Zechariah 9. 9-13 (St. Michael's – Feb. 16, 2020)

For thousands of years, human beings have been searching for something. It could be a 'Heart of Gold' in the words of Neil Young, or more typically money, sex, and power. Most of human history involves these pursuits. But the weird thing is that people who actually attain extreme success are often profoundly unhappy.

Freddie Mercury said, 'You can have everything in the world and still be the loneliest man. And that is the most bitter type of loneliness.'

Tennessee Williams said, 'Security is a kind of death. It can come to you in a storm of royalty checks beside a kidney-shaped pool.'

Yes, wealth and achievement often bring unhappiness.

But why? Why not contentment? Why are the ultra-successful so disturbed? Simply because they've come to realize what few of us ever will; power, achievement, and success do not satisfy. The human soul has a thirst for something else, something bigger than all the empires of the world.

What are we really looking for? Shalom. Peace. Wholeness. Harmony, integrity, security. *This* is what we're all struggling to find. And money can't buy these things. 'Money can't buy me love,' the Beatles sang, and it also can't buy me peace.

Fortunately, though, in today's passage from Zechariah the prophet shows us the way to peace. And there are three things he points out that we need to know if we're going to find genuine peace. And they are:

1. The posture of peace.
2. The person of peace.
3. The price of peace.

So first, the posture of peace. There's a unique posture or attitude we need to have, to know peace. And we see this in Zechariah 9, in a vivid contrast between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God.

In verses 1-8 we see the kingdoms of the world. Zechariah mentions 8 cities along the Mediterranean coast. Enemies of Israel. And prominent among them is Tyre, one of the great cities of the ancient world. Europe is actually named after a Tyrian princess named Europa. Tyre was famous for its wealth, accumulated from rare purple dye made from shellfish. In verse 3 Zechariah writes, 'Tyre has heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like mud in the streets.' We're talking incredible opulence.

Tyre was also thought to be unconquerable. Located on an island a half-mile off the coast of Lebanon, it had 150 foot walls dropping straight into the water. The Assyrians had tried to conquer Tyre and failed. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians laid siege to Tyre for 13 years and failed to break through.

Tyre was thought to be unconquerable and known for its arrogance. And yet Zechariah prophesies, 'But behold, the Lord will strip her of her possessions and strike down her power on the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire.' This would have been unthinkable at the time.

And yet, lo and behold 170 years later. Around 330 BC. Alexander the Great lays siege to Tyre. The Tyrians are arrogant as usual. They kill his representatives and throw them off the wall. And so Alexander builds a land-bridge half a mile long (which still exists to this day) and on it he brings in siege engines 160 feet tall, and he sacks and burns the unconquerable city, fulfilling Zechariah's prophesy.

What's the point? Simply that God is sovereign. And power, prestige, and wealth, are not the way to peace. God will *always* overthrow the proud.

In contrast, what is the posture of peace? We find it in verses 9 and 10. ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold your king is coming to you...He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem...and [The King] shall speak peace to the nations.’

What is this prophecy all about? It’s about the messiah, the king, the prince of peace. He will come to Jerusalem. And when he arrives two things happen.

First, the people rejoice and welcome him. ‘Rejoice O daughter of Jerusalem.’ This sounds familiar because we have Handel’s Messiah, but the image is of Jerusalem, a military citadel, as helpless and defenseless as a little girl. And this is the way to welcome the king of peace. Childlike humility. ‘Unless you become like a little child, Jesus said, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.’

And secondly, what does the king do when he gets to Jerusalem? He scatters Jerusalem’s chariots and horses. God takes away from his people their normal protection and security. The people must surrender their conventional strategies and agendas and trust him with radical faith.

I recently read the autobiography of George Muller. As a young person he was a thief, a liar, a gambler, and a drunk.

However, he had a conversion experience and gave his life to Christ. He then devoted his life to caring for orphans. He founded 120 different schools and cared for over 10,000 orphans.

But the most striking thing of all is that even though he was extremely poor, he never asked anyone for a cent. He never did any fundraising or told anyone what he needed. Instead, he prayed for hours every day that the Lord would provide. Many times the orphanages were completely out of money and food. On the verge of shutting down. But at the 9th hour, a check

would always arrive in the mail. And this is what Muller observed, ‘Rather than causing anxiety, living by faith in God alone keeps my heart in perfect peace (41).’

Yes, this is the posture of peace. Radical dependence on God. I recently learned something from our own St. Michaelite, David McLain. He’s been part of some Dad groups, and he once told our group of coming into his office in the morning and simply kneeling on the floor and praying. I shamelessly stole this practice and have found it to be a powerful way to start the day. When you get in the office, before you do anything else, simply kneel down, acknowledge your helplessness, and surrender the day to Jesus. This posture brings tremendous peace.

Of course, this is the exact opposite of most religions, which are all about achieving and working hard to be better. In the famous last words of the Buddha, ‘Strive without ceasing.’

But no, the posture of Christian faith is the opposite, as the old hymn has it, ‘Lay your deadly ‘doing’ down—down at Jesus’ feet; Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete.’

And this leads us to our second point, the person of peace. Verse 9: Behold your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey.’ Of course this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus’ triumphant entry 500 years later.

Unlike conquerors like Alexander riding his famous war horse, Jesus rides in on a lowly donkey. Because Jesus is not like other kings.

In Jesus’ kingdom the last are first and the first are last. In Jesus’ kingdom the way you find your life is by laying it down. And Jesus embodies this. Born of an unwed mother, in a stable, a refugee, the son of a carpenter. His disciples were fishermen. His friends were prostitutes. And He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’

And yet the Bible is clear, this homeless, wandering rabbi, who did not have a place to lay his head, is *the only source of peace in the universe*. You don't find peace in some nirvana attained by quieting your mind and becoming one with the universe. No, we're relational beings made in the image of a relational God. And You find peace not by quenching your desires but by throwing yourselves into the arms of the One who loves you. As Augustine noted, our hearts are restless, until they rest in Him.

And this kind of peace is unconquerable. History demonstrates this. Harry Kemp has a poem where he writes about empire-builders, Ghengis Khan, Alexander, Attila, Caesar, Napoleon. But the concluding stanza is so poignant: 'Then all these perished from the earth, like fleeting shadows from a glass, while conquering down the centuries, came Christ the swordless on an ass.'

Yes, this countercultural kingdom of peace has outflanked all the empires of the world. And it's when we kneel before the humble king, who gave his life for us, that we find peace. And this leads us to our third point, the price of peace.

Peace is not something that can be humanly achieved. Because everything that we achieve is fundamentally broken and cannot satisfy. Our bodies, our relationships, our businesses, our families, etc. This is the curse of Adam. After the Fall, God said, 'Cursed is the ground because of you...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.' Everything we achieve will have some thorns and thistles...elements that bring us pain.

No, true peace is not achieved, it can only be received as a gift. Jesus said, 'My peace I give you, my peace I leave you, do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.'

It's a free gift to us, but it was a costly gift to Him. Zechariah recognized this in verse 11, 'Because of the blood of my covenant with you I will set your prisoners free.'

Yes, this blood of the covenant is the key to freedom and peace. But why? Why is blood necessary for peace? Because by nature we are estranged from God. By nature, you and I are hostile to God. We are enemies of God. We don't want to take the posture of peace. We want to be conquerors. And our pride and rebellion create immense walls, like the walls of Tyre, between us and God. And the only way those walls of sin can be removed, that we can enter God's presence, is that *someone* has to pay the price for our sins, our treason against God.

There's a remarkable passage in Exodus 24. It's the first time in the Bible we hear this phrase 'the blood of the covenant' and it teaches us something profound. In Exodus the Israelites are camping at Mt. Sinai, the holy mountain of God. It's so holy, that if they touch the mountain, they will die. But Moses takes the blood of the peace offering—the blood of animals—and sprinkles it on the people. And he says, 'Behold the blood of the covenant.'

And then something remarkable happens. We read that Moses and 70 elders ascend the Holy Mountain. And we read that, 'They saw the God of Israel. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And God did not lay his hand on...the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.'

Yes, the blood makes a way for them to have intimate fellowship with God. And this is what Jesus means when at the Last Supper he said, 'This is the blood of the New Covenant...do this in remembrance of me.' This is why I died. To bring you into the presence of God.

Yes, on the cross Jesus sheds the blood of the new covenant. So that we can eat and drink with God. On the cross Jesus bears the thorns of our broken world on his brow, so that we can find rest from our ceaseless toil. On the cross, Jesus' dying words are, 'It is finished.' No more striving. I've done everything so that you can know peace. Trust me, rest in me, surrender to me, and know the peace that passeth understanding.

In closing, the historian Josephus records that after Alexander sacked Tyre, he made his way to Jerusalem. It looked bleak for God's people. But the Jewish high priest had a dream and God told him how to respond to the threat. And so instead of fortifying the city, the people prayed fervently and put on their best clothes. Then they opened their gates and walked out like children to meet the Greeks, led by their priests. And when they met, Josephus records, Alexander the Great got off his horse, knelt down and worshipped Yahweh, the God of Israel. Because he had had a dream and Israel's God told him that He would give him an empire.

Unfortunately, Alexander didn't take this gift of grace to heart, but continued his ambitious agenda. He died striving. But my friends, we don't have to. Because we know the posture, the person, and the price of peace.

'Lay your deadly 'doing' down—down at Jesus' feet; Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete.'