

Zechariah 12:9-14 (Edward Denny) 129992

Miscellaneous Papers, True Day of Atonement., The (12:9-14)

ZECH. 12:9-14, 13:1-9.

IN this brief passage the Spirit of God has portrayed a scene of surpassing beauty and depth, comprising in a few words what the human pen would have taken pages to give expression to, and evidencing by every touch that the sketch is wholly divine. It is a scene of no human action or exploit; or even such as we find in other parts of scripture where man is made an instrument in God's hand for His work.

What we have here presented to us is a still deeper thing: that of souls already renewed, wrought on by God. Thus its interest is wholly moral and spiritual: it is the exercise of hearts acted on by the Spirit of God; a picture such as the Lord in His word delights to delineate for us; and to represent the effect produced by such action in all its variety, be it that of joy, gladness, conviction, sorrow, or exercise, as the case may be.

Here it is that of mourning and affliction; but affliction of a high order, because not produced by any fear of judgment or retribution; not impaired in its character by any personal anxiety; but in all the depth of that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance;" that which the Holy Ghost produces when He plows up the heart and conscience to an estimate of sin, in the light, not only of holiness, but of love; when personal conviction produces sorrow of that truth and character, which, though aware that all judgment is borne, melts the heart in the sense of what it has been toward love, goodness, perfection; which adores that love, that perfection, as in exercise towards itself; and, while relieving it from all sense of condemnation, probes it in its deepest affections, and awakens its fullest adoration.

We know, or should know, what this is in individual experience. We know that it is the Lord's way, to deal with our hearts about their sin and failure in the most searching manner, after we are at home with Him and all sense of judgment or retribution is removed. We know that the purification of the affections is not only a subsequent, but in one sense a deeper and more painful process than that of the conscience. More painful to the heart that loves, though less anxious and personal; because it grieves, not in fear of loss or forfeiture, but in the presence of Love, which "heaps coals of fire on its head."

In order to bear this process, the affections must be prepared by the conscience being previously set at rest: but when all is passed through, then comes the power, the joy, the communion; the renewed bindings, and consecration of the heart to Christ, under a sense of what He is in His intrinsic worth, and what He is and has been to us amid all our sin.

All God's ways preserve such perfect harmony and consistency, that His education of the individual soul is but a miniature of His large dispensational plans. While the variety of His dealings with His people is boundless, the variety is only in means and adaptation: the aim, purpose, bearing, and moral order, are ever the same: so that, be the circle large or small, be it an individual or a class, a company or a nation, the same lines can be traced throughout: the human heart is the same, and God's purpose to bring it near to Himself never changing.

Here then is a scene of this character. We find a whole nation put into that crucible which God so constantly employs for individuals. It is not a work of CONVERSION; that had all been gone through before. It is the probing and deepening of affections already renewed; the judging of sin in the light of a presence not unknown, but brought into closer proximity.

In view of such a scene, we naturally ask, When and where does it take place? What is the subject of it? Who are the actors therein? And the answer to each of these queries greatly increases the interest of the whole. As to the first inquiry, we learn by verse 9, that it will take place after all nations which shall come up against Jerusalem have been destroyed: which event we know will be the winding up of the last week of judgment, when Christ shall come forth for the deliverance of His suffering people, according to the details of Isa. 63 and Rev. 19 so that this passage (ver. 9) at once carries us on beyond that era.

As to the second, we also learn that it takes place in Jerusalem, that center of Jewish association and blessing. As to the third, what gives rise to the mourning is the sight of one who "was wounded in the house of his friends." (Rom. 13:6.)

Then lastly, as to the fourth, the mourners consist of a body of people—a nation; every part, class, and moral element of which is expressed by four individuals, the history and calling of whom represent the different parts of the whole, as well as the implication of each in the perpetration of some great deed of blood, the remembrance of which awakens the feelings and emotions here described.

And what is the character of these feelings? It is "bitterness," such as is felt for an "only one," a "firstborn;" a fit expression for Him who was at once the first, last, and center of the hearts of these convicted and sorrowing ones!.....In a word we have here the whole Jewish nation, already quickened and delivered, but acted on thus by the personal presence and a nearer view of Christ, their once rejected Messiah, and thus brought to estimate in their hearts and affections what was the depth of their sin in rejecting and crucifying Him.

It is generally thought that the action here described is one of conversion; that of a heretofore unbelieving people, renewed on the personal appearance of Christ as their Messiah. But that cannot be. For what is "the nation"—the earthly people, at least what is owned as such by God—but the "remnant," "the residue," "the third part brought through the fire," "the shaking of the olive tree," "the new wine in the cluster"? And this remnant we find in the Revelation sealed for preservation before the week opens; converted during the week; delivered at the close of it: so that what is here described must be subsequent to the above events, and an additional outpouring of the "spirit of grace and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." And still more, we find here the whole nation—not only Judah, but Israel

also—uniting in the mourning. Now we know that Israel, the ten tribes, will not have returned to the land, as described in Isa. 11:11-16, until after the Lord has appeared for the deliverance of Judah; until the 1290 days which we read of in Dan. 12:11, have expired. The whole nation is here most completely represented by the four individual houses and their families, which are seen mourning apart. "The family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei [or Simeon] apart, and their wives apart. All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." Here is an epitome of the nation in its moral standing: the king and the prophet, the priest and the people, all mourning individually; each of whom represents an element of the nation, and, taken together, comprise it in its civil, political, and ecclesiastical aspect. What other element could be found in the Jewish nation besides the king and the people, the prophet and the priest? Each of these is a representative of a component part of the whole; and each and all are brought before us here, "mourning apart," as God's way of teaching us that the whole redeemed nation, without any exception, will in that day be brought under this searching process.

But, still more: Why, we may ask, are these four particular houses chosen as representatives of their class? Why is David chosen out of the kings, and Nathan out of the prophets, Simeon and Levi out of the tribes? Because the relation, of the mourners here to the sin mourned for is not only national, but also personal. It is a case of personal conviction, and therefore it not only overrides in its individuality natural relationships (for their families are mourning apart, and their wives apart), but four individuals are introduced as representatives who had direct connection with deeds of blood, which were typical of that great national iniquity the remembrance of which had called this scene into existence, even the murder of Christ.

David had steeped his hands in blood-guiltiness by the murder of Uriah. Nathan the prophet had been sent of God to convict him of his sin. Simeon and Levi were guilty of the treacherous massacre of the Shechemites, for which Jacob had pronounced sentence and judgment on them on his deathbed. Both these acts pointed to that deed of blood which Israel as a nation perpetrated and in which every class—every individual shared in the sight of God. Mark; all these were not actually equal in guilt. Nathan's connection with David's sin was honorable; but he is here seen on a level with the rest, to show that in the antitype all are on a par. The shaft of conviction has entered into every heart, and made the sin its own. The prophet is as guilty as the king—the reprover as the reprovèd—the priest as the people.

Simeon we may regard as representative of the latter, and so chosen on account of his guilty league with Levi. Truly were the priest and the people in league and co-operation in the murder of the blessed One, and here Levi has a double connection with the subject, both on account of his history, and his calling; the former being stained with blood, and the latter representing the priesthood; and both taken together indicating that the Levitical priesthood is wholly defiled.

Caiaphas had unconsciously expressed the same fact when he rent his garments (a thing strictly forbidden for the high priest to do,) at the moment that he accused the holy One of blasphemy. And here Levi, the root and stem of the priesthood, and Levi the murderer, the son of Jacob, is brought before us as expressing, through divine grace, the defilement of himself personally, and of his order in the presence of Him who had purged it away.

Thus every element of the nation is brought under this searching process; the families apart, and their wives apart. All—all must pass through individual sifting, while they behold in Him their Messiah, a living witness of their sin, as well as of that sin being borne by Him.

What a day of atonement will this be! that day which the tenth day of Tizri every year prefigured! On that day, year by year, from the time Israel was first established in the land, was every soul to be afflicted, under the penalty of being "cut off from his people." In the victims offered up on these occasions, the true Israelite saw the type of the one great sacrifice; and it was a season both of rest and of affliction; a Sabbath, and a day of mourning. But here, in the antitype, the restored Israelite sees, not ceremonially but in reality, his Savior and Messiah: and not only so, but Him whom his own hands have pierced: and while it is a Sabbath too in the knowledge that those wounds had atoned for his guilt, it is also a day of great mourning and bitterness as applied by Him who had covered it all.

Here then do we find Israel assembled to this solemn fast, as we read in Zeph. 3:18: "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly."

The feast of trumpets had ushered in the month; and now on this tenth day, the Day of Atonement, the nation is brought to humiliation in the presence of Christ ere the full joy of the kingdom is established.

The mourning is said to be like that of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo. Now the only place in which we find this valley of Megiddo spoken of elsewhere in scripture is in 2 Chron. 35:22, as the spot in which Josiah the anointed of the Lord was slain, and from whence arose a great mourning; for "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah; and Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations' to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations." It can hardly be doubted that it is to this scene that the mourning which we have been considering in Zechariah is compared: and the fact of an analogy being drawn between the two occasions, and their being linked together by the mention of the valley of Megiddo, is additional proof (were that needed) that the exercise of heart here described is that of the remnant of a future day, whom Jeremiah and his mourning company foreshadowed when they lamented their slain king in the same spot—even Jerusalem.

But deeper still was the probe to penetrate; and that, guided by a hand unerring as none other but Christ's could be. He is with these convicted ones in their exercise; and He draws out their hearts to a deeper and fuller view of His sufferings. To the remnant of an earlier day He had, after His resurrection, and in order to make His death and resurrection—hitherto unapprehended fully—a reality to them, shown them His hands and His side, and said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself." And again, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." Here He is found in nearly similar circumstances, and with wholly similar purposes with regard to another remnant (later, but in strict moral identity with the earlier one); and His own grace acting in their hearts causes them to inquire, "What are these wounds in thine hands?" And He replies, with touching grace, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." This was as though He said, "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." Though at the same time, while wishing them to estimate all His sufferings fully in the light of a revealed presence, not to distance them from Himself; but to bring them all the nearer. Like Joseph, who after saying to his brethren "Come near unto me, I pray you," says, "I am Joseph whom ye sold into Egypt:" but "be not grieved and angry with yourselves." So here, in a deeper and far more perfect measure, the gracious Savior seeks, not to

distress or cast them from Him while He shows Himself, as wounded for their transgressions, and that by them-selves—"in the house of His friends," but to bring them into a place of nearness, by giving them to know in their measure the fellowship of His sufferings and the power of His resurrection.

This sixth verse of chapter 13 is in connection with the previous chapter, verses 1-5 being a digression, consequent on the former, but still an interruption of the action of the scene; while verse 7 goes on to show how all this came about (as it were). "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow." Here—another aspect of Christ's death is set forth. Not only is He "wounded in the house of his friends," but He is smitten of God; and the testimony of being God's fellow is given to Him in answer to His deep humiliation. Moreover these mourners are the "third part brought through the fire" (ver. 9), of whom God shall say "It is my people," and they shall say "The Lord is my God."

And now let us turn to the digression, verses 1-5, closely connected as it is with the above scene, and consequent on it. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

Here we have practical cleansing for those whose faith in God has been already established. The day of atonement was one of cleansing of the people; the holy sanctuary, the tabernacle, the altar, priesthood, and all; as we read (Lev. 16:30), "to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." In former times this had been type and ceremony; now, "in this day," it is actually fulfilled. This is the cleansing of the sanctuary" which the angel spoke of to Daniel, chapter 8:14: "How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice and the transgression of desolation?" "And he said unto me, Unto 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Thus the whole Jewish people are established in the right relation with God. The effect of this humiliation and this opened fountain is detailed in verses 2-5. All evil is put away; idolatry and false prophecy are not tolerated even in the closest natural relationship; the very mother shall thrust through the son whom she has borne rather than allow God to be dishonored. Sin judged in the heart before God is easily dealt with in the walk.

Nothing now remained but the renewal of blessing and joy. This is expressed by the feast of tabernacles, which immediately followed, and which figuratively extends throughout the whole of the millennium; the seven days and the eighth expressing the perfection (comparative perfection) of that blessed period. It is not entered on in the scripture before us, except implied in the established and enjoyed relationship of the people with God (ver. 9); and we only mention it in its moral connection with the day of atonement, which is the grand subject this scripture treats of; and that, not in the aspect of its place in the order of events, but the state of the nation's heart, and its exercises at this significant time. It is in God's hand and under His dealing, preparatory to the full establishment of the glory in their midst. In a word, it is not position we have here, but condition, and the consequences flowing there from. Israel is assumed to be a gathered assembly before God, and as such under goes this process; The Judah part of it had gone through deep and varied exercises before, throughout the week. She had morally separated herself from the condition of things around her, had been assailed by persecution, had fled and been sheltered from it, and in the end delivered by the coming of her Lord. The Israel portion, the 120,000 lost ones, who were also sealed (Rev. 7), had been restored to the land after the deliverance of Judah, and had taken their place and kept the Passover as God's people: and here they are all together—the 144,000—the nucleus of the earthly people. But more than this was needed for the exercise of their souls. They must learn more deeply the reality of the death of Christ. They had not passed through the furnace of martyrdom, as had the other portion of the remnant now in heavenly glory: they must feel their sin in its reality; and, even as an earthly people, be put into the crucible. Their experience was very much like that of the two disciples whom we read of in Luke 24, who trusted in the one who should redeem Israel; and still more, who had known Him as deliverer and redeemer, but had not by any means entered into the depth of His death and resurrection.

THEREFORE—this process. All Israel, without any distinction of large or small measure, is brought to a level of humiliation before God on this day of atonement; a day dispensationally necessary in the ordinances of God, and morally necessary as to His ways and purpose with the hearts of His people. Truly we may say that this brief portion contains a wondrous display of both the grace and the righteousness of our God—a blessed picture truly of His unchanging dealings with all His own! The moral order is identical; quickening, deliverance, humiliation, practical cleansing, communion, and joy: and happy is the soul, whether it be that of an individual or a nation, who experimentally passes from the day of atonement to the feast of tabernacles.

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