

When they look on me...

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me again this evening to the prophet Zechariah in chapter 12? I might take as my text this evening, verse 10 in particular, where the Lord promises to his people, I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn.

In particular, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced. We gather this weekend, especially around the occasion of the Lord's Supper communion.

And it is an important part of the exercise in our gatherings, such as this evening and other days, to reflect on what the communion is for and our own approach to that occasion.

To be sure that we approach it in the right ways. And to think, when we come to the Lord's Supper, what are the things that we come to renew?

What are the things that we come to nourish? What is it about? But I do think it's also important for us to put it into words that the communion is not just for itself and it's not just for something inside ourselves.

[1 : 57] It is important to attach it to everyday life. And I think the passage that we have read and that we will dwell on now, well, this particular verse and the following verses, it seems to speak especially of the inner things of a person's life.

We have just read, and again in verse 10, about the pouring out of a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy. The section that we read through to the first verse of chapter 13, speaks about cleansing from sin and uncleanness.

And these are soul matters. These are heart issues. Things within inside us. How do they connect? How did they connect? And how do they have a bearing on us and a connection with such things as the Lord's Supper and indeed every occasion of worship in a place like this?

How do these things connect with the life that we live beyond here? Let me just take a moment then to set the scene, if I may, in Zechariah.

What was his position as he was given this word of the Lord, a burden, some weight upon him? What was his own position? What was the position of the people he spoke to?

[3 : 24] Zechariah was a prophet after the time of exile. And I'll just go ahead and say that. Some of you may be more familiar with it than others. It was after exile.

It was a time of restoration. The people of Israel had been in exile, away from their land, and they had now just been brought back and were being reestablished, put back into a position, being restored.

But you need to go back further still. And there are hints of that in the first part of the chapter. Why was it that they went into exile?

Israel went into exile, were taken, were sent into exile because of their great sinfulness. And that great sinfulness was in worship.

It was in the gods that they took and that they would worship and sacrifice to. But it was also in their everyday life. They were rebellious. They went about things in their own way.

[4 : 27] And there was a very clear line between the two, a strong connection, if not an integration of the two. One followed the other, and in return again.

Things that were true and false in their worship were at the center of their lives and everything else sprung out of that. And we come to such things as the Lord's Supper, and on this occasion, particularly the Lord's Supper, the faith that is meant to be refreshed, meant to be nourished by it, the faith that is to be built up, the faith that is to be strengthened, is to be lived.

The faith that we need refreshed and encouraged is for family life this evening or tomorrow.

It is for the workplace on Monday or your holiday, if you have that opportunity. Will we live these things according to faith is the question.

That was the question for Israel. And it's against that background that this word of God came to Israel on that day. How firm is our faith?

[5 : 53] To what extent does our faith lead us through our lives? But you know what that depends on?

And you know why the communion is so important for that? It's because the communion, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, directs our gaze to Him. From me to Him.

Laid on that table, as it were. The one whom we pierced. We look on Him. That's where you'll find the answer.

That's what you must be looking for at such a time as this. How clearly do you see? How clearly do I see?

The one who was pierced and the one we believe. The one we must believe. If you've not yet been able to say you do believe.

[6 : 57] There are many outward things that the Lord has promised through Zechariah in the early verses of this chapter. A very different position from what they had known. But now it comes to the phase where He's speaking about a change of heart.

But one that will transform from here on. Not just for a short time. He talks about a change of heart. He talks about the spirit coming.

He talks about the spiritual cataracts being removed to be able to see clearly. Once we're blind. Now they see.

And then what? I want to break it down or at least to give you an idea of the progression of what I want to dwell on this evening.

I want to look first of all on the one they pierced. And then to see that they will look on Him. The third thing, they will mourn.

[8 : 03] The fourth thing, they have the spirit of grace. And fifth, the last thing, they will be cleansed. The one they pierced, they will look on Him.

They will mourn. They have the spirit of grace. And they will be cleansed. The one they pierced, first of all. And I put my order this way this evening.

The order of the verse would appear to be different. But I come at it this way because this is the order in which we can see things. It speaks about the spirit.

They will be given a spirit. The spirit is hard to see. So what can we see? Let's come to this first. So we come here, the one that they have pierced.

Zechariah brings a message and says there will be a particular turn of events. These things will happen on that day, is how he repeats it from time to time.

- [9 : 10] But before this happened, whether it's moments before, maybe years before, there was another event. Before these things take place, these are things that are promised.
- Before they take place, something else will have happened. They pierced him. Someone has been pierced. The one whom they have pierced.
- This has come first. The amazing thing about the way that the prophet puts this is they will look on me on him whom they have pierced.
- They will look on me, the Lord says. I am the one whom they have pierced. They look on me.
- God's people pierced me. What does that mean? God's people. There was a day when God spoke of Israel and said, He is my firstborn son.
- [10 : 21] He is most precious to my heart as they came out of Egypt. There was a day when he said of his people Israel, I was a husband to her.
- She was dear to my heart. What does Israel do? The firstborn son, the bride, what does she do?
- She rejected the Lord. She rejected the Lord often. Complained against him. Rebelled against him. Refused to be, to take the words of the prophets.
- Refused the prophets. Rejected the Lord and rejection pierces a heart. Israel rejected those intimate bonds of sonship and marriage.
- Israel rejected his boundless, faithful love. Israel rejected his worship. And in the prophets, you remember what the Lord Jesus said as the prophets came.
- [11 : 29] He told that parable of the vineyard and he said, I've sent my messengers time and again and you've beaten them and thrown them out. You've cast them off. You don't want to hear them. You've killed them. My word.
- You've turned against it. I've spoken words of love to you and you've rejected me. You've pierced me. And that, of course, leads us to that parable that Jesus told.
- It finishes, he is the son that came. And the tenants said of the son, they said, now if we kill him, it belongs to us. the great rejection where God himself and his true eternal firstborn was cast off by the people.
- That's how it comes to the gospel according to John. And he watched as Jesus was crucified and he watched and he saw that spear go into the side. He said, that's what it means.
- They look on the one whom they have pierced. Jesus' side was pierced and he was certified dead. Do we look on him?
- [12 : 47] The prophets brought God's gracious word. Jesus is God's gracious word. God in person, him they pierced. They will look on me, on him whom they have pierced.
- You wanted me dead. God reminds them. And they'll look on you. That's taken place and the time comes when they will look on me.
- That's the second thing. They will look on him. And this time it seems looking, they will see. The blindness will be taken away.
- The perception of the reality in front of them. What had they seen with Jesus on the cross? Outside the city, on the rubbish dump, cast out. Like the sin offering that was to take sin away but cast out, rejected by the people out of the city.
- What did they see? You got everything. You got them mocking him, didn't you? You got the two criminals beside him and certainly one of them was mocking him. Even to the very last breath.

[14 : 07] I'm reminded of Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah was commissioned by the Lord to take his prophecy forward for perhaps another 60 years. And what was that prophecy?

It was that they will see and not perceive. They will hear and not understand. But now the time comes they will look on him and something is different.

For long enough, God's works are just a blur of color. God's words are just noise. Not perceived, not understood. But on that day, things will be different.

It's not yet the day of the Lord's great final appearing. This is in the interim. That comes in chapter 14. But this is in the time of today. From the times of the Lord Jesus himself.

This is a time and period when a number of things will unfold and amongst them eyes will be opened. The blind will see. And will know who this outcast is.

[15 : 20] This one who's hanging under a curse, pierced and dead. And will look on him. What does this mean?

Do you remember in the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, Peter took the opportunity to stand up and preach Christ.

He joined the dots, we might say, the different parts that they knew so well but didn't realize they led and pointed all the way to this one. You crucified, he said to them.

Do you remember what happened? They looked on him with new eyes. No longer rejecting him. They were cut to the heart. They saw, we pierced him.

We put him to death. We killed an innocent. We simply killed a man. And they said, what have we done?

[16 : 29] They were overwrought with grief. They shall look on me. They shall look.

They shall see who he is. The one they pierced. It's as though what was done comes back to them.

And it's there, it's there, it continues, it lingers in their mind. So it should be for all of us if we have not received the Lord Jesus in our hearts that what he has done should be, yes, nagging away in our minds until we resolve the matter.

We pierced him too. Now dear friends, we pierced him. We, so many years later in our history, but in God's eternity, we pierced him by our sins.

I don't want to bring the tone down unduly, but there's a picture in our, our, our daily lives. You know, the times that we, we hear of a, a small shop having to close, a specialist shop, and then we go out and we say, oh, these, these supermarkets, they're killing the, the small trader.

[17 : 59] But how does that work? It's because we choose to go there and not there. Yes, the supermarket is, is, is the agent, if you like, the immediate agent, but we are the ones responsible.

How much more in our sins? There are the sins that, that, if we can put it this way, it seems so, so distant from the Lord Jesus and his death on the cross, but not to the Lord God.

They are part of the sins of mankind that put him there. We pierced him. Let us look on him and see him as he is for who he is.

They will look on me on him whom they have pierced. Every time, friend, every time, you go out of these doors without receiving him, you again pierce his heart as he reaches out to you every time here and calls you, come, be mine.

My son has died. I've gone to the greatest expense because I love you. Will you pierce his heart again by turning from him?

[19 : 33] I plead with you not to, but instead to come to look on him and as you see him for who he is, join with these people who will mourn for him.

They will mourn for him, the third thing. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn.

Acts 2, cut to the heart, what have we done? What have we done to this Jesus, the Christ, the one God has appointed?

It will be mourning for him, not in the first place for me, but for him who had no reason to die but we put him to death, that he is gone, he is taken from us.

Do you remember too Isaiah 53? He speaks of him who was marred, who had no beauty that we should desire him but now to see him in all his loveliness, that heart that was demonstrated to us on the cross of his great love for us, all his loveliness of his innocence, the loveliness of his glory, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, mourning for him whom we pierced, looking on him, mourning for his loss, deep sorrow too over personal culpability.

[21 : 14] It's wrong that he should have been killed. mourning for his and only child, mourning as a firstborn. Remember Egypt on the day of the Passover and the people of Israel being brought out of Egypt, the last plague where God inflicted death on every firstborn except those covered by the blood and the great weeping and wailing that spread across that nation, the wailing, the mourning, as for a firstborn.

It's extended further if that's not enough. It's repeated time and time again to demonstrate just how the magnitude of this mourning.

Verse 11, on that day, the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megidon. And this seems to be a reference to the death of Josiah.

in battle against the Egyptians. Josiah, he was one of the great reformers in Israel, in Judah, in Jerusalem.

He was the hope of Israel on the outside at least. but I find that striking as it's presented to us in this chapter because it doesn't, this chapter does, does speak about the outside hope, the exterior hope, the national hope, but here in these verses it speaks about the foundation for a lasting hope.

[22 : 56] Many probably hoped under Josiah's rule that this was a new, a new dawning, a new hope for Israel. And it was struck off in his prime.

Second Chronicles chapter 35 tells us of his weeping. It tells us that Jeremiah and the prophets wrote lamentations which were continually recited.

the hope of Israel was struck down. They shall mourn for me on him whom they have pierced.

The hope of Israel struck down. That's how great the mourning will be. The mourning will be in verses 12 through 14. It will be everyone involved.

The land shall mourn. But everyone personally involved, it will not just be a national occasion but it will be a personal occasion to each family by itself.

[23 : 58] That as the spirit pours out as it was foretold in the prophet Joel on all, all will be struck, all will see, truly see this one whom they pierced.

David and Nathan, both the senior and the junior branches of the royal family, Levi and the Shemites, again, the senior and the junior branches of the priesthood, the two great strands that were to lead the people of Israel in righteousness, all represented here, inclusive of all the people and if that weren't enough in verse 14, all the families that are left, each by itself and their wives by themselves.

That poetic repetition to drive home the point of the personal effect, personal realization, personal sorrow of what has been done.

Everyone knows I was one of those who pierced him, rejected him. Deep grief at the act that was taken.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7 of the sorrow. There are different kinds of sorrow. This could be something that is heard and seen to be a great sorrow but we're told here it's a very personal one.

[25 : 32] It is great but it is digging deep in the hearts of many. 2 Corinthians 7 Paul speaks about the sorrow, the godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

It's something that is deep within a realization of my personal involvement in the trouble that has brought this about. If you go to Joel, the prophet Joel in chapter 2, 13, there is the call to rend or tear open.

The practice in those days for mourning was to take your clothes and rip them apart to show your sorrow. He says, don't rip your clothes, rip your hearts apart. Rip them open, tear them that the grief is true, that it is right within you, your most inner being.

They will look on him, they will see him for who he is, and they will mourn, grieve over him. And thus far we might say, well these are things that can be recognized, things that even, that you can recognize yourself.

Realization of who it is that we have pierced. A great sorrow over that piercing, that action, that rejection. A sorrow that will lead to repentance, a true desire to turn away from what has been, a transformative sorrow.

[27 : 01] change in life, for this evening, for tomorrow, for Monday, and on. There is evidence in these things, but it's evidence of certain things.

And that's where we began that section in verse 10. How do we know that these things are true? It's because of this mourning, this intent sorrow over him that was pierced.

And thereby, through that, we know that the Lord has poured out the spirit of grace and that spirit of pleading for mercy.

It's a spiritual thing. It is something that brings about a new mind, a new spirit within. Some here, we have it, that the Lord will pour out a spirit of grace.

It could well be the spirit of grace. And we don't get grace except God's spirit is at work. And it's this grace that turns us to plead for mercy, to seek for mercy from God.

[28 : 17] There is no other grace, there is no other way that we will turn to God for mercy, except by his spirit. That is the great transformation of human heart.

to seek for mercy. Otherwise, we will come saying, I have this, I have that. Mercy says, I have nothing. It's this grace that opens eyes, gives perception to realize and to recognize, to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.

It's this grace that leads us to the realization of our own part in his death. my own sin, pleading for mercy.

It's that spirit that led that tax collector that Jesus spoke of to plead simply for mercy, humbling himself, I have nothing to bring.

And it's that spirit of grace, having that spirit of grace, grace, that speaks of faith. You know that that's what's encouraged, you know that that's the way that we lay hold of Christ, you know that that is the entry into the privileges of the Lord's Supper.

[29 : 40] It's also the entry into the privileges of God's word, week after week, to receive it, to take it as yours. it is no different.

The question of faith, are you inclined to ask yourself from time to time, do I have faith or don't I?

Do you ask yourself, how good is my faith, how strong is it, how do we know, or what are you looking for? Can I say to your friends, stop, looking for faith in your heart, you're looking for the wrong thing, look on him whom I pierced, who you pierced, just look on him, just look on him, look on him as he's laid on the table on the Lord's day, if you look on him and you say he is my all, you happen to have faith as it happens, don't look for faith, look for him, have that spirit of a plea for mercy, I have nothing, may I have you, he gives himself, this is my body, this is my blood, it's yours, take it as yours, and you will have faith, and as soon as you know that, put the faith to one side, just keep looking at him, look on him whom you have pierced, see him, mourn over your own part in putting him there, in his piercing, it is my sin that put him there, it's by my sin that he is there, do I see him, do I see him in this way, then I have faith, in some ways the

Bible and the New Testament letters and such like things, they say these things, they say these words to give us an explanation, but it's an explanation, it's not the root by which we gain the blessings of the kingdom, there is only one way, I am the way, the truth and the life, said the Lord Jesus, look to him, look on him, whom I have pierced.

You know with the free offers, let me talk supermarkets this evening, the free offer that you might have, I say buy this and you'll get that, but if you really need this, the first thing, it doesn't matter whether you get that or not, so long as I have this, and you go out looking for this and the free offer is a bonus, as it were, so long as I have this, do I have him, then whatever else comes with him, that's a blessing, but I must have him, that's what I've come out for, to find life in him, friends, let that be your objective in life, look on him, look on him, be sure you have him, whom you have pierced, receive that spirit of grace, and the plea, and the humility to ask for mercy, and so the last thing to highlight just for a moment is at the end of this, it wraps it beautifully together around the morning, looking on him, and looking what I have done to him, but there is something yet to come, if that was all there was, the morning, and that was the end of the story, it would be such a sad day, would leave us empty, but it's not all there is, there is something else comes with it, on that day, they will be cleansed, on that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness, this ESV includes, to cleanse, it is talking about that, but there is a beauty too in the original, that the fountain will be opened for sin and uncleanness, to wash away, to cleanse, remember the tax collector again, he prayed,

[34 : 27] Lord have mercy on me, a sinner, and what does Jesus assure him, he went away justified, the mourners on, looking on those, on him whom they pierced, they also come to the fountain, and find cleansing, newness of life, mourning is broken hearted, pierced, cut to the heart, men, brethren, what must we do?

Repent, be baptized, repent and believe, cut to the heart by that new spirit within, but that new spirit doesn't just bring mourning, and a realization of that truth, the new spirit brings this cleansing, and the fountain of cleansing, it's the same spirit doing the same work, bringing the same newness, fountain of washing open for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, gods, people that he's spoken of earlier, that sin might be removed.

I have pierced him, I therefore have nothing left, but I also have cleansing, I must receive the gift that is given to me.

Friends, as we do approach the Lord's table, where, as it were, his body is laid, that pierced body is laid before us, let us look on him, and let us see, let us know, no more resistance to him.

That goes for every single one of us, how often we do resist him, but it's to bring grief, it's to bring confession, to bring repentance, the sorrow that leads to repentance.

[36 : 28] There are many times that you perhaps and I, many of us have prayed for revival, but it would seem as best I can understand of the occasions that we call revival, it would seem a universal element, very few that come in every single one of these, but one that you find in it seems virtually every one of them is confession of sin, brokenness of spirit.

What have I done? those things my life that has pierced him. And that is the route to cleansing.

Isaiah chapter 6 says he has torn us that he may heal us. He's talking surgery here, cutting us open, to take out what is diseased, to heal, to renew, to cleanse.

This tearing of our hearts, mourning, that sorrow that leads to repentance, that he may heal us, cleanse us.

What are we to look for when we come to the communion table? what are you to look for if you're in that place you're wondering, should I come?

[38 : 02] What are you to look for? Don't look for faith, friend. As soon as you've found it, you've lost it. It's one of those things because you're looking at the wrong thing.

But look to him whom you have pierced, I have pierced, we have pierced, they have pierced. Look on him. Let him fill your vision.

Look on him. Plead for mercy and know the assurance of this cleansing. This fountain has opened for sin and uncleanness.

Yours too. Will you wash there? And each day, not just communion day, but each day, take that new life that he gives and give it over.

This was the transformation that Israel so desperately needed and had never been able to find yet. But now, this work in their hearts, the spirit of grace, seeking for mercy, mourning sorrow over sin, looking for cleansing at his fountain, gives them new life unto obedience, which they had never found before.

[39 : 33] And friends, as we take communion, those of us who do, remember that's what that's for, a new life of obedience, looking on him we have pierced.

So far, may God bless his word to us.