

“FOUL, I TO THE FOUNTAIN FLY”

I. Introduction

- A. I have made reference in other sermons to a term that was coined by the writer J.R.R. Tolkien, the term ‘eucatastrophe.’
1. The prefix ‘eu’ means ‘good.’
 2. We can see this in the word ‘eulogy’, which refers to a ‘good word’ that is spoken about someone at a funeral.
 3. A ‘eucatastrophe’, then, is a ‘good catastrophe.’
 4. Tolkien invented this word to describe a plot device that is found in many great stories.
 5. It is that moment in the story when the worst thing that could happen happens, but then, through an ironic twist, the catastrophe becomes the means by which the story’s main problem is resolved.
- B. This is what we see described here in Zechariah 13.
1. The shepherd of God’s flock, the Messianic Branch whom Zechariah has foretold, is stricken and his sheep are scattered.
 2. The Messiah is the one who will build God’s true temple, the one who will reign as a priestly-king over God’s people.
 3. The striking down of the Messiah is the worst thing imaginable.
 4. Yet in God’s perfect plan it is the very thing that had to happen in order to secure our redemption.

II. The Fountain of Cleansing

- A. The chapter begins with the Lord declaring, “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.”
1. The day of which the Lord is speaking here is the day of the Lord, the day foretold through the prophets when God’s purposes will reach their appointed end.
 2. While the prophets speak of the events that will take place on the day of the Lord in a compressed manner, the New Testament reveals that these events will unfold over the course of the epoch that began with the first coming of Christ and that will be consummated when Christ returns.
 3. This is why Paul speaks of himself and other first century Christians as those “on whom the end of the ages has come.” (1 Cor 10:11 ESV)
 4. It is why the writer of Hebrews says that “in these last days, [God] has spoken to us by his Son”. (Heb 1:2)
 5. It is always good to be reminded that we are living at the end of the ages.
 6. We are living in the epoch when God’s plan to redeem his people and judge the world is reaching its climax.
- B. Our text in Zechariah tells us that the central feature of this day is that it is the day when God has opened a fountain to cleanse us from all our sins.
1. This is good news for people who are mourning bitterly over their sin, which is how God’s people were described in the previous chapter. (12:10)
 2. The opening of this fountain of grace is the fulfillment of God’s promise back in chapter 3 to “remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.” (3:9b)

3. That is what God did by sending his Son to die on the cross.
 4. God opened up a fountain to wash all our sins away.
 5. The Gospel of John points out how this was symbolized when the soldier pierced Jesus' side as he hung on the cross.
 6. John tells us that that action produced a flow of water and blood from Jesus' side.
 7. Being a Jew, John certainly would have seen symbolic significance in this.
 8. Under the law of Moses, water was used for ceremonial cleansing and the blood of the sacrifices was used to make atonement for sin.
 9. The flow of water and blood from Jesus' side declared that his death was the fulfillment of all of those ceremonies.
 10. This is why Jesus said "It is finished" when he drew his last breath on the cross.
 11. On that day, God removed the iniquity of every individual whom he has appointed to eternal life.
- C. We should also reflect upon the fact that God chose to speak of this by using the image of a fountain.
1. Think about the distinguishing feature of a fountain.
 2. Unlike a basin of water, a fountain is source that never gets polluted or used up.
 3. It is an inexhaustible supply.
 4. This is what we have in Jesus Christ.

5. As the great Calvinist hymn-writer Augustus Toplady put it, Jesus is the "Fountain of never-ceasing grace."
 6. He is the all-sufficient source of cleansing from all of the ways in which sin pollutes and condemns us.
- D. It is also significant that God says that he is the one who opens this fountain.
1. This makes it clear that there is no other source of cleansing.
 2. As John Calvin once said, "we must always go to the fountain that cannot be drained dry, and not to the cisterns that are full of holes and can hold no water, or rather which have nothing but mud and filth in them (for all the glory and boastfulness of men is no better)." [*Sermons on Ephesians*, 146]
 3. We cannot cleanse ourselves from the defilement of sin.
 4. Toplady reminds us of this in another of his great hymns when he writes,

*Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*
 5. When we are washed in that Fountain, we can know for certain that we are clean in God's sight, because those who are washed in that Fountain lose all their guilty stains.

III. The Removal of Falsehood

- A. This brings us to the next thing that God says he will do on the day of the Lord: he will cut off the idols and remove the false prophets from the place where his people dwell.

1. Idolatry and false prophecy go hand in hand.
 2. When people worship and serve created things in place of the one true and living God, they will never have the patience for true preaching.
 3. Instead, they will surround themselves with teachers to suit their own passions and satisfy their itching ears.
 4. The church has always been plagued by idolatry and false teaching.
 5. It continues to be plagued by it today.
 6. There are many who call themselves Christians who replace God's revelation of himself and his will in Scripture with their own notions of who God is and what God requires of us.
 7. In fact, when we look at the state of the contemporary church and the church across history, it is remarkable that God's truth has not been utterly lost.
 8. The fact that it has not assures us that our God is being faithful to the promise that he gives in this passage.
 9. He will not let his church be overrun by falsehood.
 10. He continues to expose and confront falsehood with the light of his truth.
 11. And a day is coming when he will remove it from his church entirely.
- B. Zechariah describes God's judgment upon false prophets by saying that the parents of children who utter lies in God's name will put their own children to death.
1. This points back to the command that God gave in Deuteronomy 13, telling his people that they were not to tolerate idolatry or false prophecy even when it was being promoted by their closest

relatives.

2. God said, "you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him." (Deut. 13:8-9a)
3. This may seem harsh, but God required it under the theocracy in Israel, which was a unique arrangement where the civil sphere was subsumed under the religious sphere.
4. In short, the entire nation was the church.
5. God issued such commands because he wanted his people to understand that it is an evil thing to tolerate false teaching in the covenant community.
6. And while the death penalty is not in effect for such sins today, it remains the case that we are not to tolerate falsehood in Christ's church.
7. Paul made this clear in his letter to Titus when he said that those appointed to the office of elder must be able to rebuke and silence those in the church whose beliefs or lives run contrary the sound doctrine that God has revealed in his Word. (see Tit. 1:9-10)
8. This even holds true when it is a close friend or a family member.
9. Our loyalty to God always needs to come first.

IV. The Stricken Shepherd and His Sheep

- A. This brings us to the last part of the chapter, which consists of a poem about the stricken shepherd and his sheep.
 1. At first, this may not seem like it has anything to do with what is said in the first part of the chapter.

2. But when we read these verses in the larger context of chapters 11 through 13, we can see that it all fits together.
 3. God described himself in chapter 11 as the shepherd of a people who despised and rejected him.
 4. Then in chapter 12 God said that he would pour out his Spirit on his people so that they would look on him as the one whom they have pierced and mourn over their sins.
 5. And this chapter begins with God saying that he will open up a fountain to cleanse his people from their sins.
 6. When we put all of this together, we see that this poem at the end of chapter 13 shows us that God has provided cleansing for his people by causing their shepherd to be stricken on their behalf.
 7. This tells us that sin can only be atoned for through a substitutionary sacrifice.
 8. The Messiah must be subjected to suffering in order to save his people from the judgment that our sins deserve.
 9. As it says in the song of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, "it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief".
 10. God subjected his beloved Son to the cursed death of the cross, and Jesus willingly went to that cross, in order to bear the judgment that we deserve.
- B. Our text also says that the striking of the shepherd will result in the scattering of his sheep.
1. The Gospel writers point out how this was fulfilled when Jesus' disciples scattered after his arrest.
 2. While all of them except Judas were soon restored, this was not the case for most of the Jews.

3. Only a remnant believed in Jesus.
 4. This is what it means in verse 8 when it says that two thirds shall be cut off and perish.
 5. This remnant principle continues to be operative throughout the church age.
 6. Again and again, we see that many who profess Christ prove to be unwilling to hold fast to the truth.
- C. As for the remnant who are preserved, God says that he will put them into the fire and refine them.
1. This is a picture of the Christian life.
 2. God uses the trials and sufferings of this life to refine and sanctify us.
 3. He uses distress and affliction to humble us and teach us to rely upon him for our help.
 4. He uses tribulation and trouble to train us in patience and obedience.
 5. He uses all the difficulties of this life to stir up the graces that he bestows upon us by his Spirit.
- D. We need to remember that our Lord is the Great Physician.
1. He alone knows what is needed in order to complete his saving work in each of our lives.
 2. Being mindful of this makes even the sorest of trials easier to bear.
 3. As a Christian, no matter what you are experiencing, you can be confident that your God has a good purpose for you in it.

4. This is what we remind ourselves of when we sing these words:

*When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume and your gold to refine.*