

I.N.I.

Reformation Sunday
Oct. 31, 2010
Zechariah 12:10

In Christ Jesus, who was pierced on the cross for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Build My House! For the past few weeks now we have taken the time to hear the Old Testament prophets speak to us the same words over and over. The remnant of Jews returned from Babylon and in zeal and excitement began to rebuild the temple; but they didn't get very far. The foundation was laid, the altar was built and the rest lay in ruins. God first sent Ezra to encourage the people, then He sent His prophet Haggai and at the same time the prophet Zechariah. Each of them had the same message; **BUILD MY CHURCH!**

And so it has been the calling of every prophet and preacher since that time, to proclaim to God's people, **BUILD MY CHURCH!**

Today we are celebrating the Reformation. One of the external situations that led up to the Reformation of the church at Luther's time was also the building of a church, namely St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Roman Catholic hierarchy felt that it was their God-given calling to build the most ornate, glamorous and beautiful cathedral in the world. And in order to do that they were willing to sell the Bishopric (the office of the Bishop) of Mainz to the highest bidder; they were willing to gouge and deceive the people by selling indulgences (a declaration that stated that those who purchased this indulgence would enjoy a perfect remission of all sins, be restored to the state of innocence which they enjoyed in baptism and would be relieved of all pains of purgatory.) Those buying indulgences on behalf of the dead already in purgatory need not themselves be contrite and confess their sins. Such were the gross ungodly teachings of the Middle Ages during Martin Luther's time.

As true prophets, Haggai and Zechariah's primary goal was not to build a beautiful temple in Jerusalem but to proclaim God's Word so that hearts would be turned to the Messiah, and through the power of the Word and the Spirit build a house in their heart. His grace alone could rekindle the right kind of zeal to build this kind of House of God. By their preaching they were to first and foremost build up the kingdom of God, the Church of God, meaning bringing souls into a proper relationship with the Lord Jehovah through the promised Messiah.

Zechariah has been called the prophet of Passion Week. In his short book of 14 chapters he records 11 specific prophecies concerning the Messiah, more than any other Old Testament book except Isaiah. In last Sunday's sermon text we heard of the Messiah being the Priest-King. Zechariah also prophetically writes of Jesus entering into Jerusalem riding upon the colt of a donkey, of His being betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and of the death of the Shepherd for His sheep. And in our text this morning Zechariah speaks of Jesus being pierced on the cross.

Our text says; **THEN THEY WILL LOOK ON ME WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED...** The LORD JEHOVAH is here speaking. The Lord of Glory will be cruelly murdered. Here we see the oneness of the Messiah Jesus with the I AM---JEHOVAH; for in vs. 1 we read, **THUS SAYS THE LORD JEHOVAH** and verse 12 is a continuing quote from the LORD JEHOVAH. But in the very next verse we see the personal distinction of

the Son from the Father when JEHOVAH goes on to say; **THEY WILL MOURN FOR HIM AS ONE MOURNS FOR HIS ONLY SON.** Not they will mourn for Me, as the LORD had said they will pierce Me. Here we see a beautiful Old Testament reference to the teaching of Jesus that **I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE**, not one person but one God, yet two distinct entities. We see this distinction again when Jesus cried out on the cross **MY GOD, MY GOD WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME.**

Zechariah, some 500 years before the crucifixion, takes us right to the foot of the cross of Christ to look upon Him being pierced by the spear of the soldiers. Imagine the people of Zechariah's day pondering these words, searching for understanding to the mysteries of the Suffering of the Messiah. In these words they could clearly see that this death of the Shepherd, this piercing, was God's own sacrifice for mankind. For it was JEHOVAH Himself who brought down the stroke of death upon His own Son, the stroke of Justice.

This grace of God touched the hearts of the people in Zechariah's day. They were so moved by the prophetic sight of the Messiah being pierced for them that they now stood up to their enemies, both from within and without--the Samaritans who had tried to hinder their work and the Emperor who had commanded it to cease. Once again they began to serve their LORD in rebuilding His house and re-establishing their worship of Him.

Though the church in Rome, many years later, presented Christ in the best artistic paintings of the day on the walls, the ceilings, and in the stained glass windows; yet looking on Him whom they had pierced was not the focus of their cathedrals and teachings. Their foundation was not Christ, but the selling of human souls into spiritual death. Their support was not Christ's shed blood but the gold and silver of the people. Their ceilings or coverings was not the forgiveness of God through Jesus but the papal pardon which even superseded Christ's forgiveness.

Martin Luther, the Zechariah of his day, on Oct. 31, 1517 (493 years ago today) went to the church door to focus the hearts of the people upon Jesus, the Christ pierced for all of the world, suffering and dying on the cross for all the sins of all people.

As Luther pierced the church's door with nails that held up the 95 theses (95 statements concerning the forgiveness of sins alone through Jesus Christ) He was directing the hearts of the people away from man-made inventions of indulgences and purgatory and work-righteousness to the piercing of their Lord and Savior on the cross.

The Jews of Jesus' day had Zechariah's words, they had his prophecies being wonderfully fulfilled right before their very eyes in the person of Jesus Christ. They looked upon Him whom they pierced, not with sorrow, or the beating of their breasts in repentance, but with venomous hatred and unrelenting ridicule. For man's fatal flaw in his nature is that he believes that he somehow deserves God's love and forgiveness by his own personal worth, good works or high status. "I am better than others, I work harder, I deserve more." Such unbelief therefore sees no desperate need for Christ's death. They do not see how they too pierced Christ.

They, like Pope Leo X in Luther's day were using the cross of Christ for their self interests. The grace of God can be lost even by those who claim to hold it. When following Christ becomes a means for selfish ends then grace is no more grace. For it is only God's grace that produces sorrow at the foot of the cross. Unbelief cannot hold to grace. It trusts in its works. In unbelief there is no beating on the breast in personal guilt and sorrow, in unbelief there is no realization as to how one's unholy living also brought about the crucifixion of God's Son.

This grievous sorrowing for Christ, whom we also pierced because of our sins, is the sole result of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon us. The Spirit who produces faith by grace through the Gospel, the Spirit who produces repentance that clings to such grace; that Spirit Zechariah says will be poured out upon the House of David, the Holy Christian Church.

This already began at the cross. The one thief crucified next to Jesus sorrowed over his own sins and looked upon Jesus, as the Christ, and said, **LORD JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM.** The Centurion declared at Jesus' crucifixion; **TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD!** and the crowd that stood around Jesus looking at Him as He hung of the cross, having watched Him being pierced by the soldiers went home beating their breasts in sorrow.

On Pentecost, Peter declared, **GOD HAS MADE THIS JESUS WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST.** It was the Holy Spirit who used these words to **CUT THEM TO THE HEART.** And the Holy Spirit has also been poured out upon us to focus our hearts upon Christ crucified and risen for us, leading us to repentance!

But just sorrowing at the foot of the cross is not enough. For many years Luther too sorrowed at the foot of Jesus' cross. He knew full well that it was his terrible sins and transgressions that put Christ there, but he did not find it possible to trust in that very death for his assured forgiveness. Luther was so desperate about how he had pierced Christ with his rebellious heart, that he could not believe he could be forgiven and accepted by God. Luther was plagued by the **RIGHTEOUSNESS OF WORKS.** How could Christ who expected perfect righteousness from him ever forgive him when he failed to live righteously again and again? No matter how hard he tried, he could never live that perfectly righteous life God demanded in His law. What about us? What about you?

Have you lived that perfect life of obedient love in thought, word and deed? Have you lived righteously every day and every moment of every day? Have you always obeyed your parents in everything? Have you always loved and served your spouse?

It was the Holy Spirit working through the Law that brought Luther to understand he hadn't and he couldn't live righteously. It was the same Holy Spirit working through the Gospel that brought him to trust that Christ, whom he had pierced because of his sins, who bestowed upon him His own righteousness. It is in Christ's righteousness that we stand, not our own, for we have none.

Who of us would ever have thought of such a thing? Who of us would ever have dared to teach or even suggest that we set our trust in the righteousness of the very One whom we have sentenced to die and pierced with our own sins?

The work of God's grace brings about this trust in Him whom we have pierced. Yes, God's grace alone leads us to sorrow over Him whom we have pierced but then also leads us to trust that very One for full forgiveness and righteousness.

And there is more unbelievable grace! In verse 8 just prior to our text we read: **IN THAT DAY THE LORD WILL DEFEND THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM; THE ONE WHO IS FEEBLE AMONG THEM IN THAT DAY SHALL BE LIKE DAVID, AND THE HOUSE OF DAVID SHALL BE LIKE GOD, LIKE THE ANGEL OF THE LORD BEFORE THEM.** Here the Lord is saying that in that day the smallest, weakest, the most feeble who look upon Christ in faith will be like King David, the hero of the Old Testament who conquered the giant Goliath. In the strength of the Lord's grace no sin can stand against us and the Lord says we will be like God Himself, like the Angel of The LORD, for we will be filled with His righteousness and His power.

So we look back upon history this morning and we see a handful of Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of God even in the face of persecution and trials. We see a handful of disciples spread the message of salvation through Christ crucified and risen again to the rest of the world even in the face of tremendous persecution and trials. We see a lowly monk, named Martin Luther, stand up to the powerful heads and magistrates of the church proclaiming Jesus Christ, focusing the eyes of the people on the One whom they have pierced because of their sins. Who could believe--who could even think that there was and is such power in simply looking with faith on Him whom we have pierced? Out of the heart and mouth of an infant praying "Abba, Father" in Jesus name, comes the strength to scatter every enemy, even Satan, death and hell.

Unfortunately, as many in the wilderness, when told to look upon the brass snake and be saved from the poisonous snake bite, refused to do such a foolish thing, so also many do not look with repentant sorrow and confident trust upon the One whom they have pierced upon the cross. But the Scriptures clearly declare; **BEHOLD HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, AND THEY ALSO WHO PIERCED HIM. AND ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN BECAUSE OF HIM.**

Unbelief cannot escape its piercing crime--not by the way of the Pharisees--work-righteousness--nor by the way of indulgences--buying your way. This message; **THEY WILL LOOK ON ME WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED**, touches us with the grace that leads to repentant sorrow over our sins and a confident trust in the pierced one Jesus Christ for the full pardon of all of our sins. It is a Word that makes us weak, lowly human beings as strong as King David fighting the giant Goliath, for then we are filled with the power and Spirit of God.

Now! says the LORD with this zeal, **GO**, proclaim the Good News of Salvation through Jesus to the whole world and **BUILD MY CHURCH!**

Amen.