### “Revealed to Infants” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 9, 2023

**Zechariah 9:9–12**

9Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. 12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

**Matthew 11:25–30**

25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

I hope you’re enjoying the summer, as I am. Buds and flowers are pushing out. It’s a season of beauty, especially with all the birds that visit our feeders. We’ve nurtured many generations of titmice, finches, and bluejays, and they repay us just by being themselves.

So that’s beauty. Let’s move from beauty to truth, by looking at the Scriptures. I’d like to delve into the Zechariah text first. It starts out with the prophecy of a peace king, who will put an end to war, removing weapons and commanding peace from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Aqaba, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. This peace king will have the power to make all nations cease from war. Along with the famous passage in Isaiah about beating swords into plowshares (Isa 2:4), it’s one of the most important peace prophecies in the Bible. In the prophecy, the Lord also promises to set prisoners free, “because of the blood of my covenant with you” (9:11). To understand this, we need to understand what kind of covenant he’s talking about. It is a covenant that is sealed with a sacrifice and a solemn promise over the blood shed. In a covenant sacrifice, both parties promise not to break the covenant, at the cost of being dismembered and bloodied, like the sacrificial animal. The sacrifice in this case is not for purification or forgiveness, but stands as a threat and a self-curse. When I was young, we used to seal a solemn promise by swearing “cross my heart and hope to die.” That’s a self-curse or self-threat. It’s the same with a covenant sacrifice. Swearing by the blood is a way of saying “I will keep this covenant, or may death come upon me.”

In the Zechariah text, God is promising or swearing by the blood of the covenant to rescue the Jewish prisoners. Maybe these were prisoners held by the Chaldeans or the Persians, whichever was the dominant empire at the time. The covenant that lies in the background comes from Exodus 24:8, where Moses sealed the covenant upon the people. It says there “Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” Zechariah is recalling this covenant, and assuring his listeners that God takes that covenant very seriously, that he will rescue prisoners and restore them double, presumably meaning double the wealth their grandfathers or great grandfathers had when they were exiled to Babylon. The “prisoners of hope” are encouraged to believe in God’s support and to rebuild Judah.

There is encouragement in the gospel passage, as well, but directed at a different crowd. It seems designed to offer encouragement to whoever was feeling burdened, overworked, disrespected, or vulnerable. Jesus assures them that truths have been withheld from the supposedly wise people and revealed to infants, or those who were treated as infants. He then offers words of encouragement to those who carry heavy burdens and who need rest. He will give them rest, he will put his light yoke upon their shoulders. And he has the power to reveal the truth about the Father to them. “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27). He *does* choose to reveal the Father to people, as we find numerous times in the gospels. What this gospel passage highlights is that he reveals these truths to the little people, “infants,” and thus, uplifts those people. Similarly, the Zechariah passage entails an uplift and rescue of the prisoners of hope.

There are many downcast people in the world today: victims of sexual misconduct by adults in their lives, victims of war and oppression, and also of pollution and industrial waste. There are those who have been considered uncool or uninteresting by their peers; those who are looked down upon. They might all become prisoners of hope, if only they nurture spiritual hope in their hearts. Maybe you are one of these prisoners of hope, even if it just means you were not popular in high school, or not the favorite child in your family. Maybe you, too, needed the amazingly contrasting message of God’s love. Maybe you were an infant to whom the wisdom of God was revealed.

Those neglected ones, the insulted and the injured, are they who are most grateful when they receive news about the love of God, because it goes against the evil that the environment has been showing them. Or maybe you received plenty of love when you were a child, but have had to work extraordinarily hard as an adult. Maybe you are weary and heavy laden. Then you will be amazed to hear from Jesus that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, and that he will give you rest. Rest is one of the heavenly rewards. So is justice, and a proper respect. No one there is treated as an infant. . . or as an idiot. You will be valued as a beloved son or daughter. That is God’s gracious will.

There are many who are rich and powerful in this life, but they have made very little *spiritual* advancement. Likewise, there are many who are not much respected in this age, but they have strength of soul, which will be recognized in the next life. As Jesus said, “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Matt 19:30). He returned to this theme repeatedly, as a way of showing that earthly status did not identify spiritual status, and to uplift the pure of heart.

Jesus often drew attention to the so-called little people who had faith. He said “take heart” to people who had faith but who also needed encouragement (Matt 9:2; 9:22). He built them up and credited their faith, saying “your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50; 18:42). It’s like an equal-opportunity family in the kingdom of God. You go as far as your spirit takes you.

So whether you feel you have been blessed in this life or whether you feel that you have been a prisoner of hope, you are welcomed in this family. There will be growth, there will be rest, and the yoke will be easy.