

## Title: “Today Hurts”

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Zechariah 9:9

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**Service Readings:** Zech. 9:9–12; Rom. 7:14–25a; Matt. 11:25–30

*Our suffering is not alien to Jesus, because He suffered. But He offers us the promise of a life in the world to come that will be void of it. He calls us to Him where he promises that peace and rest.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

He sat across the table from her and listened to her speak. The right words were coming out of her mouth but he was confident that she didn't really believe them. It wasn't in *how* she spoke, for she did so with such conviction. It was much more subtle, much more nuanced. Her body language, and her prior thoughts she had shared with him many times at this very table, all painted a very different picture than that of her spoken words.

These conversations could go on for hours, and over the years they seemed to always be the same. She would lament, complain, and even weep; he would listen. And he would listen until he could do so no longer. And then he would judge her state of mind and decide if he would end the conversation or ask if she wanted his advice. But these days, he became increasingly tired of even asking, for so often she would welcome it, but then discard it and the conversation would repeat itself in the days or weeks to follow.

Although he was tired and exhausted, he would try to empathize with her. She had lived a very troubling life. Her childhood was a conglomeration of both nurture and abuse. She grew up in a home with parents who loved her and cared for her, but in that same home she experienced pain and suffering – physical and emotional. And all of this laid the foundation for a life filled with mental and emotional suffering. Every day seemed to be a struggle with *something* and every day she fought to push through it, to even find a *reason* to push through until the next, for she knew that as the sun would rise, so too would her problems. She would never find freedom.

And so he tried to be as patient as he could. Lately, it became even more difficult for her attention had now turned to God. Why would he allow her to live this kind of life? Does he hate her? Does he enjoy watching her suffer every moment of the day? And even worse, does God even have the power to free her from this? And if so, is he just not compassionate enough to do it? How was this man to respond to her questions? What was he supposed to say?

Now, we can give this man advice and we can even make it sound wise and theologically sound. And we can do this because we are emotionally disconnected from these two people – we don't know them. And so it becomes easier to offer our own words of advice. But what if we pause and look into our own lives? We might not be as burdened as this lady, but some of us might be close. How many wake up every morning with a responsibility that weighs heavy on our lives? Maybe it is

caring for a loved one in a way that you knew might come, but hoped was still far into the future. Maybe it was gradual or maybe it was sudden and even unexpected, and in a moment your entire life changed and now your day is devoted to the care of him or her. Or maybe it is a past event, a loss of such great magnitude that you cannot ever imagine moving past it, and you are not even sure you *want* to move on because you fear leaving the object of that loss behind, losing all of the memories you cling to so tightly. In these times, do you question God? Do you even dare? And if you do, if you confide in others your darkest thoughts, what do you do with the response you receive? So often, advice becomes increasingly difficult to accept the closer that advice moves towards you.

But this morning I ask you, even beg you, to open your heart to really hear the words of scripture that were read to you this morning. They are words that speak directly into your life, into your situation. They are words that offer strength and stability, words that offer comfort and peace. These are the words of God and these are words that have his power behind them – power to not just pierce your heart and mind but power to transform you. What does this mean? It means that these words have God's power to not simply *describe* but actually *provide* you with what you are looking for. We see this promise in our Old Testament reading where

We see this promise in our Old Testament reading where Zechariah writes during the time when the Israelites were being held captive by the Babylonians. They had lost it all – their freedom, their beloved Jerusalem, and even the dwelling place of God. The struggles that they were experiencing are difficult for us to understand, even appreciate. To lose everything, even the dwelling place of God must have been a heavy weight on their lives. But into this dark period spoke the prophet with words of encouragement:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The king will come. And the king will do what all kings set out to do – free their subjects from the chains that bind them. But this king will accomplish it in a way that sets will set all things right. Every last tear will be wiped dry because this king would come. But he wouldn't come with sword in hand. He wouldn't destroy the enemy with overwhelming power. At least not in the way that we would expect a king to act. No. Instead, he would come humbly, quietly. He would come with such compassion, such love for his subjects that he would conquer *through* his own suffering. He would lay down his life, even separate from his father. This would be how he fought the battle. And he would do it so that he could speak into each of our situations with a compassion that was real, that was believable, and that we could connect to. He could now answer us as we called out to him in frustration and even anger. He could reply that he knows what we are going through, because he has already experienced it. He knows what physical pain is – true physical pain, for he was beaten within a stroke of his life. And then he was nailed to a cross where he would suffer until his last breath. And he knows what emotional pain is – complete emotional and spiritual pain is. He knows what emptiness is, because his father turned his back to him. While at the same time suffering physically, he was suffering complete separation; he was suffering hell. And he was doing it

willingly. He didn't have to go through any of this, but he did because he wanted us back. His compassion and his love is such that he can't imagine losing us to the reign of sin. The Father sent him and he obeyed, willingly. And it wasn't a hesitant obedience. Even in the midst of pain, inflicted on him by those who counted him as an enemy, he had such compassion that he prayed for their forgiveness. For he knew that on the other side of his cross lay a freedom that all could take hold of, and he loved us enough to want to offer it.

This lady that sat across the table from this man had heard this many times before. She had heard the words of God, but she still couldn't believe them. Deep down she probably did believe in God's grace and Jesus' compassion, but she couldn't look past her own situation, her own life. Her days were consumed with these struggles. And if you can relate to her in some way, you too know that it is difficult, nearly impossible to see beyond the stresses of the current hour. And if this is you, I encourage you to find time, even just a few moments, to open God's Word and let him work within you. For he will raise your head and cast your glance beyond your current struggles. The words of Zechariah even says that much: he promises to take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem. He promises to break the battle bow and proclaim peace to all the nations. He promises to rule from sea to sea – to the ends of the earth. He is your king. And he has come. And he has fought. And he has suffered. And he has won. And he offers that victory to you. A victory in the form of a promise of an eternal life lived without the pain and struggles that you are experiencing in your current one. But while you are on this side of death, he promises that he continues to love and care for you. And you can rest in the assurance that he understands the situation you are in and the struggles that you have.

Are you hurting? Are you feeling isolated? Are you feeling abandoned by God? Jesus has a message for you.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me,” he says, “all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Come to him. Trust that he knows what you are going through. Trust that he truly cares. Trust that he loves you more than anything. And come to him. You can find peace in him; you can find rest. He promises it.

Please pray with me.

Lord, today may hurt but we cling to the knowledge that you are with us in all that we experience and we cling to the hope that your death and resurrection have provided, that one day we will experience a life lived fully and completely – free from suffering and forever in your presence.

Amen.