

What is He Worth to You?

Zechariah 11:7-13

⁷So I shepherded the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I shepherded the flock. ⁸In one month I got rid of the three shepherds.

The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them ⁹and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh."

¹⁰Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. ¹¹It was revoked on that day, and so the oppressed of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord.

¹²I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.

¹³And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord.

You've maybe heard it said, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Or, "One man's junk is another man's treasure." Let me give you an example of that. When my dad passed away and our family had to sell the farm, we didn't have any idea what all the stuff that Dad had accumulated was worth. So what did we do? We had a farm auction. We let the bidders determine what each item was worth to them. And there were some real surprises. For some items, as the bidding went higher and higher. I'm thinking, "You've got to be kidding me! You're going to pay that much for that thing? There were other items that I thought would bring top dollar—and they went for next to nothing. I'm thinking, "Man, that thing is worth far more than that to me. I'll buy it myself." That's the way it goes when valuations are subjective. The price is set by what someone is willing to pay. But that's true for more than just items in a farm auction. It's also true for people, for human beings.

In our midweek Lenten sermons this year, we are going to be focusing on some of the prophecies contained in the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Now maybe you are thinking, "Zechariah? What does Zechariah have to do with Lent? Actually, maybe more than you realize. Zechariah has sometimes been called the Holy Week Prophet, because of the great detail with which he predicted some of the events in Jesus' final hours. And our text for today is an excellent example of that. Here, the prophet, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, looks ahead to a time in Jesus' life when a price is put on Jesus' head. And it begs us to ask ourselves this question:

What is Jesus worth to me?

Our text begins with a description of the relationship between a shepherd and his flock. In this case, the shepherd is the prophet Zechariah and the flock is the nation of Israel. The prophet writes, *So I shepherded the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and I called one Favor and the other Union, and I shepherded the flock.* With those words, the prophet speaks of two staffs to describe the way that God has blessed his people. He has shown them favor. He has treated them with undeserved love. And that unconditional love created a union between God and his people.

And yet, in spite of all that God had done for them, in spite of the loving concern that God's shepherd had shown to them, how did the people respond? Zechariah says, *The flock detested me*. The Hebrew word there means more than just they were little miffed Zechariah. It means they loathed him. They wanted nothing to do with him or the God who sent him.

So in the end, what does the prophet Zechariah do? He says, *I grew weary of them and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die and the perishing perish. Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking my covenant I had made with all the nations.* In other words, Zechariah basically says, "I quit." In fact he goes on to say, *"If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it."*

How do the people respond? Zechariah says, *"So they paid me 30 pieces of silver."* Now, today we might say, "Whoa, 30 pieces of silver. What's silver worth these days, like \$75 an ounce? If each of those pieces weighed an ounce, you'd have over \$2,200 of silver. Nice. That's a pretty tidy sum."

But actually, that's not the message the people were sending here. In the Old Testament, 30 pieces of silver was not the price you paid for a king. It wasn't the price you paid for a respected leader. It was the compensation you paid for a slave who had been gored by a bull. It was the price you paid for what you might call "damaged goods." That's what the people thought their shepherd was worth, namely, not much.

In fact, in the end, God tells Zechariah what he thought about the price the people put on Zechariah's head—and God tells him what to do with it. The prophet writes, *The Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter—the handsome price at which they valued me!"* You can just about hear the sarcasm in the prophet's voice. So, what did Zechariah do? He says, *So I took the 30 pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord.*

Hmm. Does that sound at all familiar? Do you see any parallels between what happened to Zechariah and what happened to Jesus during Holy Week? Just like the prophet, that Jesus was detested by the people he was called to shepherd. The Jewish leaders despised Jesus. They plotted to kill him. And how much were they willing to pay to make that happen, to, in effect, put him out of a job? That's right. 30 pieces of silver. Think about that, the sinless son of God, the perfect shepherd of the sheep, being priced like he's a crippled slave.

But it's not just the price on Jesus' head that the prophet Zechariah foretold. Think of what happened next. When Judas realized that Jesus was going to be condemned to die, what did Judas do? He tried to give the money back to the Jewish leaders. And when they refused to take it, Judas threw the money into the temple. St Matthew records what happened next. *'The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 'So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 'That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 'Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.* Not just the words of Jeremiah. The words of Zechariah, as well.

Now you realize, the reason we're studying these words from Zechariah is not only to show how closely connected the Old and New Testaments are, how the Old Testament is revealed in the New and the New Testament is hidden in the Old. No, these words were also written to reveal something about our own hearts. Think about it. The Jewish leaders considered Jesus to be worth 30 silver coins. The question is, what about you? How much would you say that Jesus is worth to you? Or to put it another way: Of all the things that you value in life—your family, your health, your job, your reputation, your retirement account, your free time, your favorite sports team—of all these things you value in life, where does your relationship with

Jesus rank? I know, we like to say, “Jesus is #1 in my heart.” But does that show in our lives? If someone were to study how you prioritize your time, what's most important to you, or if they analyze your paycheck to determine what's that very first dollar spent on, would it be obvious how much Jesus means to you? If you are given a choice to do what God wants you to do or what you want to do, who comes out on top?

If we're honest, too often it's not God who wins. It's not Jesus who we value the most. How often don't we find ourselves standing where Simon Peter once stood, with a servant girl pointing her finger saying, “Aren't you one of his followers?” And instead of taking a stand for Jesus, instead of putting our faith into action, instead of showing how much Jesus means to us, we fall on our faces and say with Peter, “Jesus? I don't know the man.”

My friends, if you've ever fallen into that pit, if you've ever denied or devalued your Lord, if you've ever allowed a hundred other things to fill your brain or capture your heart, you're not alone. We've all been guilty of that kind of lukewarm allegiance to our Lord. The question is, how does our behavior impact our relationship to God? If that's the kind of person that I am by nature, what hope could I ever have of being accepted by God or spending eternity with him?

The answer is found not in the value we place on God, but rather on the value that God places on us. How much are we worth to God? Well, on the one hand, we are worth nothing. We have no intrinsic value in and of ourselves. Rather, our worth is based 100% on how much God was willing to pay for us. He paid the ultimate price for us, namely, the blood of his own son. How does Martin Luther put it in the explanation to the second article of the Apostles' Creed? Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.

My friends, that's what gives you value in God's eyes. Your worth is not based on how much you value God. It's based on how much God values you. It's based on what God proves you are worth to him. It's just like the stuff in my dad's farm auction. The most valuable item was not the one that I thought was most useful or you thought was most beautiful. It's the one that someone paid the highest price for. Well, there is no higher price that can ever be paid than the lifeblood of the perfect Son of God. And that's what Jesus paid for you. He paid it to set you free from all the other gods of this world. He paid it so that you can know that you belong to him. He paid it so you can know how much he loves you, so you can know he forgives you, so you can know how precious you are to him.

In fact, isn't that why Jesus invites you to regularly partake of his body and blood in the sacrament holy Communion? Every bite of bread and sip of wine is a reminder of the price Jesus paid to make you his own. And there is something so very personal about that sacrifice Christ made for you. I mean, when that bread and wine, and with it the body and blood of Christ, are placed on your lips, God is making a personal covenant with you. He's saying, “Your sins are forgiven. You are a redeemed child of God. You are good to go!”

My friends, 2,000 years ago, someone decided that Jesus was worth 30 pieces of silver, just as the prophet had foretold. What about you today? What do you think Jesus is worth? What value do you place on the Lord and your relationship to him? What sacrifice would you make, what cross would you carry to be called one of his disciples?

Those are tough questions, which require some real soul searching. But the answer that you are looking for, the answer that God is looking for as well, will not be found in your heart, it won't be found in how much God means to you. Rather, the answer will be found in God's heart, in his love, his sacrifice, his commitment to walk with you every step of the way until he

brings you through the gates of paradise.

My friends, that's what makes all the difference. When you know God's grace in Christ, when you know what God is done for you for the sake of his son, when the holy Spirit has worked that conviction in your heart, then you truly know... What Jesus is Worth to You. Cherish your most precious treasure, in Jesus Christ. Amen.