

Stranger of Galilee

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Scripture references are from the *New Scofield Reference Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *The Best of J. Vernon McGee, Volume 2*,
Copyright 2006 by Thru the Bible Radio.)

Mistaken identity has been the plot source for writers of both comedy and tragedy over the centuries. Shakespeare wrote several comedies using this as his source – for example, his *Comedy of Errors*. And Dickens used mistaken identity as a source for tragedy in his *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is the basis of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and continues to be used in many dramatic productions today. But how much more tragic the situation becomes when it moves out of the storybook world of myth and comes into real life!

I read some time ago of a mother who had not seen her daughter for seventeen years. Both of them were among the misplaced persons after the war in Europe, and the daughter had been taken from the arms of her mother when she was a baby. When the girl was eighteen or nineteen years of age, the mother heard that she was coming to this country. That mother was so anxious to see her daughter that she spent all the savings she had to get from Chicago to New York City so that she could be there when the ship docked. But when the girl came down the gangplank, the mother didn't recognize her. She went right by her daughter, almost touched her sleeve, and so they became separated again. That was tragic indeed! Newspaper reporters became interested, but it was not until both got to Chicago that mother and daughter were able to be reunited.

May I say, mistaken identity can cause great tragedies. But the greatest tragedy of the ages is expressed in eleven words found in the Gospel of John:

He came unto his own, and his own received him not. (John 1:11)

John the Baptist elaborated on that a little farther on:

John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not. (John 1:26)

How tragic to have one that's so important to know – so important that it's life eternal to know Him – *in your midst* and not recognize Him! Our Lord, at the conclusion of His ministry, almost wails when He says, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:44). And later on, Paul could write:

But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.
(2 Corinthians 3:14, 15)

What a tragedy it is to have the Son of God Himself right before you, and then to have an impenetrable curtain let down so that you do not know Him at all.

Zechariah is the prophet who emphasized the fact that when our Lord came the first time He would not be recognized. He is also the prophet who emphasized that when the Lord comes the second time He *will* be recognized. In fact, it's Zechariah who by inference said that when He comes the second time, the remnant of Jewish people will know Him. However, they will not know Him by the prints of the nails in His hands, but they will wonder about those nail prints and ask, "Where did You get those?" What an amazing thing it will be in that day! It is Zechariah who tells us they not only will express amazement, but they are also going to mourn when they see the Lord Jesus at the Second Coming.

So Zechariah sets before us the fact that *redemption* is the high word at the first coming of Christ and that *revelation* is the high word at the Second Coming. He says that at the first coming of Christ the emphasis is on *reconciliation*; at the Second Coming the emphasis is on *recognition*. At the first coming of Christ it's the *incarnation* which is in the foreground; at the Second Coming it is *identification*. At the first coming it's the *mystery*; at the Second Coming it's the *manifestation*. In the first coming there was *propitiation* for our sins; in His second coming there will be the *proclamation* of all that He is.

First Advent: Redemption

Notice if you will this distinction: There was redemption but not revelation at His first coming. It's important to pay attention to this.

And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. (Zechariah 13:6, 7)

Now there are those today who discount Zechariah 13:6 as being a reference to the first coming of Christ. In fact, they say that it does not refer to Him at all. The "higher" critics in the school of unbelief were the first ones, of course, to call attention to this.

There is a higher criticism that is very valuable in the study of the Bible. But some unbelievers have been in the vanguard and have not only led but pushed the importance of higher criticism. Unfortunately, some theologically sound men have followed these critics. We live in a day when there is an overweening desire to appear as a scholar. Someone has said that a thesis today for a doctoral degree is compiled from research done in a great many books that nobody reads and put in a new book, which nobody will read. If you are able to do that sort of thing you are labeled a scholar. Dwight D. Eisenhower put it this way: "An intellectual is a man who takes more words than necessary to tell more than he knows."

May I say to you, I sincerely believe with all my heart that verses six and seven of Zechariah 13 belong together and that they definitely refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. And when this question is asked – and it will be asked of Him at His second advent — "What are these wounds in thine hands?" He'll answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." I can't believe that would refer to false prophets and prophets of Baal, especially when I find other Scripture like the glorious Psalm 22, which sets forth the crucifixion of our Lord. This psalm gives a clearer picture of Christ's crucifixion than is found even in the Gospel records. Christ Himself is speaking, and you see what goes on in His heart when He says, "For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet" (Psalm 22:16). That, my friend, is certainly a picture of the crucifixion of Christ, and it's a prophecy of Him.

And so here in Zechariah 13 He is asked the question, "These wounds in Your hands, what are they?" The answer is twofold. First, "These are what I received in the house of my friends." Will you notice that for just a moment. "Wounded *in the house* of those who loved Me" is a better translation. He doesn't say – and the language is very exact – "by those who loved Me," because when He was crucified those who loved Him did not drive nails in His hands – it

was those who hated Him who did that. Our Lord said, “They hated me without a cause” (John 15:25). Those who were beneath His cross – Roman soldiers, religious rulers, and the mob crying for blood – hated Him. When He says that He received those wounds in the house of those who loved Him, He was referring to the house of Israel, the house that began with Abraham.

It was Abraham who loved Him. Our Lord Jesus said, “Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day” (John 8:56). And David, to whom the prophet Nathan brought God’s message that He was going to bless his house, said as an old man, “God took note of me and said He would send one in my line whose kingdom He would establish forever!” (See Psalm 89.) It was David’s one hope that the one who was to come in his line would be the Messiah. It’s little wonder that the New Testament opens with: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). David and Abraham loved Him, so our Lord at His second coming will say, “These are wounds I received in the *house* of my friends.”

However, He hasn’t really answered their question. He merely has said that the wounds were received in the house of His friends. But their question is, “*What are* these wounds in your hands?” He hasn’t answered that in verse six, which is the reason, my friend, that verses six and seven must go together. Their question is answered in the seventh verse. Now this is God the Father speaking:

***Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow,
saith the LORD of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;
and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.*** (Zechariah 13:7)

In other words, it is the Father now who comes forward and says, “Did you want to know about those wounds in His hands? I’ll tell you about them: ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow.’”

The sword is used here as a symbol. Obviously, our Lord was not killed with a sword; He died on a cross. There are many references in the Scriptures about the sword being a symbol of justice and of death. God again and again said, “I will send the *sword* upon My people” (see Jeremiah 24:10 and 49:37). What does He mean? He means that He will send a judgment of death. God is speaking of our Lord’s death, and He says to the sword of justice and judgment, “Awake!” Going back to that glorious psalm which speaks of His death, our Lord cries out from the cross, “Deliver my soul from the sword...” (Psalm 22:20). What did He mean by that? He is dying on the *cross*, which means that He is dying a judgment death. Why? He’s being made sin for us! The one “who knew no sin” is bearing the penalty of sin and is dying a judgment death (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). I say this reverently – the sword of God’s judgment against my sin is sheathed today in the breast of Christ! It will never be lifted against me, and it will never be lifted against you if you have trusted Him, for it is sheathed in His heart. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd.”

Now I begin to draw near to the Garden of Gethsemane. As I come near it, I hear Him say, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Now I understand when He says in Matthew 26:39, “Let this cup pass,” that it is the cup of judgment. But He accepts it – “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). God “spared not his own Son” but literally gave Him up freely for us all (Romans 8:32). What a glorious picture we have there!

Our Lord Jesus, quoting Zechariah, used this very verse during His last evening with His disciples. At supper He had broken the bread saying, “This is my body which is given for you” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.” Then, when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (See Luke 22:19, 20, 39.)

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (Matthew 26:31)

The sword of God’s judgment has been awakened. “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10). When God’s judgment fell upon sin, it didn’t fall on me – it fell on Him. He is my substitute. He died a substitutionary death for you and me. That is the badge today of the Father’s love; “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). That sword is the fraternity pin of the Father’s love for us, the sword of justice buried in the heart of Christ.

We hear Peter on the Day of Pentecost giving the all-comprehensive statement of it as he addressed the men of Israel who had delivered up Jesus to death:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. (Acts 2:23, 24)

He is saying, “You did it, but it was the Father who awakened the sword of justice.” Sin must be dealt with, and God dealt with the sins of mankind there on the cross. What do those wounds mean in His hands? They mean that you and I will be presented someday without spot and without blemish because He bore the penalty of sin on the cross.

Now will you notice, the prophet says something else, and these are startling, world-shaking statements:

...And against the man who is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn my hand upon the little ones. (Zechariah 13:7)

What a picture we have here! The Father says, “You smite, and the sword will wake up against not only My Shepherd but also against My fellow [His equal].” This tells us, my friend, that when the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth around two thousand years ago, He was equal with God the Father. We were not conceived as Jesus was conceived. We are sinners in need of a Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ was unique; He was God manifest in the flesh. When he was on the cross, God was in Him reconciling the world to Himself. So God the Father could say that Jesus Christ was His equal.

The early church fathers had a much stronger conception of this than we do today. Oh, I wish that all believers could lay hold of these great truths in the way that the early church fathers did. Do you know what they said about Him? Athanasius referred to Christ on the cross as the body of *God*! That’s too strong for today’s pulpit, but it needs to be said. Tertullian, speaking of

the suffering of Christ on the cross, called it “the passion of God” and then said that those who crucified Him are murderers of *God*. Ignatius spoke of “the passion of Christ, my God” and said that man killed God and is therefore guilty of deicide.

Is that too strong for you? I’ll make it stronger. If Jesus Christ came back tomorrow afternoon and walked the streets of this earth as God manifest in the flesh, before the sun went down a mob would gather determined to kill Him. Humanity today, in sin and rebellion against God, would kill God if they could. Satan tried to take His place and dethrone Him. Those in the Garden of Eden and in the world today are attempting to get rid of Him. They try to rule Him out, reject Him, or ignore Him. My friend, Jesus was God! And they hated Him and nailed Him to a cross. But – oh, wonder of wonders – they did not know Him, and yet it was God at that very moment putting His arms around those people and saying, “I love you enough to die for you.”

Second Advent: Revelation

This verse speaks of a day that is coming in the future:

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

“In that day,” He says, “I will *pour* upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace.” You find here at the Second Coming that He uses the figure of pouring in relationship to the Holy Spirit. God has never yet poured out His Spirit as He’s going to do in the future. It was said of the Lord Jesus that God “giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him,” meaning He gave to Him His Spirit without measure (John 3:34). He hasn’t done so to you, and He hasn’t done so to me. You and I would not be able to contain Him. We’re told to be filled with the Spirit. Even if we were filled, we wouldn’t hold very much. As a little girl prayed, “Lord, fill me with your Spirit. I can’t hold very much, but I can run over a whole lot.” That’s what we need today – the flowing of the Holy Spirit through our hearts and our lives. In that future day God says, “I will *pour* upon the house of David.” It’s the same picture in Joel:

And it shall come to pass afterward [that is, in the last days], that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh [that has never yet taken place]; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and, also, upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:28, 29)

In this day in which we are living, as in every other age, we are as blind to Him as the people were when He came the first time. You and I can never recognize the Lord Jesus unless the Spirit of grace opens our eyes. In Romans 5:5, Paul mentions those things that come to us because we are justified by faith. Among them is hope:

And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.

You and I can never love God or have that love manifested through us except by the Holy Spirit. That is the work of God's Spirit alone, and it can come to us only through His grace and mercy.

When they crucified our Lord, there were beneath that cross men who hated Him. They cursed Him, and those religious rulers shot out the lip at Him. I'm confident that standing among them that day was a young Pharisee by the name of Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul. He was in Jerusalem, and I'm sure he would never have stayed home when his archenemy, the one he hated above everyone else, was being crucified. But even he obtained mercy. When Paul was an old man, he wrote to a young preacher, Timothy:

And I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecuter, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. (1 Timothy 1:12, 13)

Saul of Tarsus wrote of a veil that had been on his eyes. There at the cross he hated Christ. He persecuted Him, blasphemed Him, and was the chief of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15)! Why was he so blinded? Because he knew from Zechariah's prophecy that there is a day coming when our Lord will come in power and great glory.

At Christ's first advent, many – including Paul – did not recognize Him, but when our Lord comes back the next time, these people who didn't know Him will say, "What mean these wounds in your hands?" He will respond, "I received them in the house of my friends." And the Father will say, "He's My fellow, My equal. You kill the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But even then, I'm going to pick up the little lambs so they will not get lost."

When Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom on earth, He will say:

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

Light for the Blind

Over the eyes of these people a veil hung. Paul says that blindness, in part, had happened to Israel. Do you think that the Gentile is not blind? Listen to Paul:

But if our gospel be hidden it is hidden to them that are lost, in whom the god of this age hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4)

My friend, Satan is trying to put that veil down over your eyes, trying to blind you to the person of Christ. Many folk say, "But I don't see Him." Of course, you don't see Him, but it's not because your Savior who died for you is not there. It is because you are blinded.

Allow me to use a familiar illustration. The story is told that years ago in a coal mine in West Virginia there was an explosion way beneath the ground. The rescue team went to work

frantically alongside loved ones of those miners who were trapped. The team dug to them and finally got through far enough to begin administering water supplies and connect a light bulb. When they made that connection, the light bulb came on with all of its several hundred watts. But one young miner stood there, squinting his eyes and saying, “Why don’t they turn on the light?” All the men who were trapped with him looked at him, startled. The light was on, but he had been blinded by the explosion. It wasn’t the rescuers’ light bulb that blinded him; it merely revealed that he was blind.

Christ is the “light of the world” (John 8:12). He wouldn’t blind anybody. But, my friend, if you say you can’t see Him as your Savior, it’s not because He is not shining down on you. It’s because you are blinded.

People are blinded today for many different reasons. There are some who are blinded by sin. I talked to a young man who has seen too much of this world. He said to me, “I’ve listened to you on several Sundays. I’d like to do what you tell me to do, but I am too far in sin.” Blinded by sin.

There are those today who are blinded by self. I talked to a man several years ago who was a Mr. Milquetoast type of person, a nice little fellow. He said to me, “Do you mean to tell me, Pastor McGee, that God would let me be lost? I never did anything that was wrong. I’ve never even had a traffic ticket!” (And he hadn’t — he’d always obeyed his wife!) He was blinded by self. Oh, how many people are blinded by self!

There are those who are blinded by prejudice. I’m sorry for this. There are people who go into a church and then drop out because they are prejudiced. They say, “I think church people are hypocrites, and I don’t like hypocrites.” Oh, my friend, don’t let them keep you from God! Do you know today that there are a lot of counterfeit twenty dollar bills in circulation? You aren’t going to get rid of your twenties just because there are some counterfeits, are you?

There are those today who are blinded by indifference, flippancy, or cynicism. They’ve resisted the Bible so long that they are hardened to the Lord Jesus. The Scripture says,

He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. (Proverbs 29:1)

This means that the moment you least suspect will be the time of your death. If you think that somewhere down the line you will make your decision for Christ, you’re wrong. You will be hardened.

Are you blinded to the glories and the beauties of Jesus Christ? Do you know this stranger of Galilee? Can you see those wounds in His hands and have to ask, “What mean those wounds?” Or can you confess that He “was wounded for your transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5)?