

God's Message to Us in Zechariah 1-8

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Introduction

Last week, we looked at Haggai in our sermon series in which we are looking at God's message to us in every book of the Bible.

- I am not sure how I made this mistake, but I said that it was one of the last three of the minor prophets' books that were written after the exile (that was correct) and that it was number 9 of the 12 (that was obviously wrong).
 - Of course it is actually number 10 of the 12 and today we come to Zechariah which is number 11 of the 12.

Haggai is actually very closely related to Zechariah because both were written at about the same time and for the same purpose...

- to encourage the Jews to get on with rebuilding the temple that had been torn down by the Babylonians almost 70 years before.
- Let me give you the sequence of how their prophecies overlap.
 - Oracle 1: 1st day of the 6th month, second year of Darius (520 BC)
 - Haggai calls them to get to work on the house of God after neglecting it.
 - Work resumes on the 24th day of the 6th month.
 - Oracle 2: 21st day of the 7th month
 - Haggai encourages them to stay at it even though the temple is not as magnificent as Solomon's temple that had been torn down.
 - Oracle 3: The 8th month.
 - Zechariah encourages the people that God is with them if they turn to Him.
 - Oracles 4 & 5: 24th day of the 9th month.
 - Haggai calls them to be holy in oracle 4...
 - And in oracle 5, the LORD promises that Zerubbabel will be His signet ring.
 - Oracle 6: 24th day of the 11th month...
 - Zechariah has eight visions showing them that the LORD is with them, and that He will help them.
 - These run from Zech 1:7 to the end of chapter 6.
 - And then two years later (518 BC on the 4th day of the 9th month),
 - Zechariah gives prophecies in which he sets forth the glorious work of Jesus Christ who is to come—in Zech 7-14.

This whole book is, like Haggai, an encouragement to us to do the work that God has called us to do.

- The LORD assures us that He will be with us to help us when we return to Him...
- And He makes it clear to us that we are part of the great work He is doing through His glorious Son.
 - What an encouragement to us to pour out our lives into His service!
- Let's explore this tremendous book of encouragement.
 - There is so much in Zechariah that I am going to spend two weeks on it.
 - This week, we will look at the first eight chapters.

I. First, Christian, learn from Zechariah 1-8 that the LORD will be with you if you but turn to Him.

A. This theme is clearly set forth in the opening oracle in verses 1-6.

1. It doesn't matter how far you may have strayed in the past...
 - In verse 2, God says that He was very angry with their fathers...
 - He certainly was...
 - They knew it—the temple had been destroyed, all because of their wickedness against God.
 - Many of their fellows Israelites had died and their cities had all been destroyed.
 - You may have provoked God to great anger in the past.
 - The church in Canada certainly has.
 - There has been so much sin and rebellion among us.
 - So much unbelief and so much turning from His ways.
2. But look at the promise of God in verse 3 to them... and to us...
 - **Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - a. Did you notice how it says “says the LORD of hosts” three times?
 - He wants to make sure that we know that this is a message from Him.
 - It is such a remarkable message—and one that is hard to believe.
 - We have not gone too far!
 - Even though we and our fathers have greatly provoked Him to wrath, He is always ready to take us back!
 - **“Return to Me,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - b. All you have to do is come back to Him and He will have you back.
 - He does not require some great act of penance or some period of probation where you must prove yourself.
 - He has made provision for us in Christ... that is the testimony all the way through the Bible.
 - God has made provision for our sin... all He asks of us is to return to Him... to come to Him... and He will return to us.
 - What a kind, welcoming, gracious God He is!
 - How we have sinned!
 - How we have insulted Him!
 - How we have spurned His call!
 - Yet, He says, **“Return to Me, and I will return to you.”**
 - Dream not of making yourself fit for Him.
 - Come wholly trusting in His free grace and He will receive you with joy and rejoicing.

3. Perhaps you responded to the call last week from Haggai... to return...
 - Just as they got back to building the temple, perhaps you got back to building His kingdom... to seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness.
 - To seeking the LORD in prayer,
 - To family worship and personal Bible study,
 - To diligence in public worship,
 - To reaching out to your friends and neighbours who do not know Christ.
 - To repent of hypocrisy and to start living for the LORD again.
 - To put away those sins and start living for Christ again.
 - But you feel your weakness as you put your hand to the work!

TRANS> Well here is encouragement for you...

B. Zechariah's eight visions testify to you how God will be with you when you return to Him. Let's look at them.

1. First there is the vision of the horses in chapter 1 verses 7-17 where we see that the Angel of the LORD is interceding for us!
 - a. In the vision, there is a man with horses among the myrtle trees... humble but lovely trees that represent Israel in this time of their smallness.
 - These horses have been out investigating the earth and their report is given in verse 11 to the Angel of the LORD... who is in the Old Testament pre-incarnate Christ... He is God and He is from God and with God.
 - And what is their report to Him?
 - Verse 11: **So they answered the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."**
 - b. The way Angel of the LORD reacts to this report may surprise you at first...
 - Verse 12: **Then the Angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?"**
 - The idea is that the nations who are not serving God are flourishing while God's people, His church, is struggling to survive.
 - You see in verse 14 the LORD says, **"I am zealous for Jerusalem,"** and in verse 15: **"I am extremely angry with the nations at ease."**
 - c. And so the LORD assures the Angel of the LORD, and all of us, that He *will indeed* have mercy on Jerusalem: **v. 16: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it.... v 17: My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem."**
 - Yes, the church today is in pitiful shape... but the LORD is with us when we return to Him and He will help us rebuild.
 - Blessed be His name!
2. Second, there is the vision of the horns and the craftsmen... in verses 18-21.
 - a. There are four horns that represent the nations that scattered God's people because the LORD was angry with them...
 - A horn represents their strength and their pride...
 - But now there are four craftsmen... one for each horn—who terrify the horns and cast them out.

- b. Our enemies can be so proud in their opposition to the LORD... feeling superior to Him as they deny Him and trample on His people...
 - But the LORD will use humble instruments (craftsmen) to bring them down...
 - A monk like Martin Luther...
 - A fisherman like Peter...
 - A carpenter like Jesus of Nazareth.
 - An unnamed martyr in Iraq giving her life as I speak for the cause of Christ and bringing brave men to tremble before the LORD as they look on.
 - A servant of God like you, living your life for Him at work.
3. The third vision is of a man with a measuring line, measuring Jerusalem.
- This is the subject of Zechariah chapter 2.
 - It is noted that Jerusalem has no walls... they had been torn down, and if you will remember, the temple was rebuilt first, then the walls.
 - In those days, a city without walls was very vulnerable to attack...and this man seems to be measuring so that they can be built...
 - But the LORD indicates that it is not time to build walls yet—that He Himself will protect the city.... look at verse 5: **“For I,” says the LORD, “will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.”**
 - Yes, not only will He protect them, but He will dwell with them and be their glory and then the nations will come to them.
 - v. 10-11: **“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the LORD.** ¹¹ **“Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst.”**
 - The work we do for Christ—even building a second-rate temple—impacts the nations of the world!
 - God’s kingdom will be much grander than Jerusalem...
 - And so it is!
 - It has spread to the nations—and let us see it spread again among us.
 - Rebellious kings will be humbled if we return to Him.
4. The fourth vision is in chapter 3, and what a grand vision this is of Jesus!
- a. It so happens that the name of the priest at his time was Yeshua (Joshua or Jesus—same name).
 - And Yeshua is the high priest at the time of Zechariah... he is clothed with filthy garments with Satan standing to accuse him (v. 1).
 - But the LORD rebukes Satan and orders this Yeshua, who represents our Jesus, to be clothed with clean clothes!
 - b. The Angel of the LORD, the Son of God, tells this Old Testament Jesus that he and his fellow priests are a sign of the BRANCH that is to come. v. 8: **Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My servant the BRANCH...**
 - And look, my brothers and sisters, at what the LORD will do by the BRANCH as the coming priest...as stated at the end of verse 9:

- **And I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day.**
- c. That is our Jesus! He is the BRANCH.
 - He atoned for our sin by one sacrifice forever—in one day.
 - Not a sign or symbol as it was with the OT priests, but in truth... by the sacrifice of Himself.
 - He is the BRANCH that reaches to the nations.
 - What a tremendous encouragement... We have a priest we proclaim who takes away sin forever by one great offering on the cross.
 - In Him we have forgiveness.
 - In Him we have a message of salvation for all people.
 - Let us continue to go forth building His temple!
- But the visions don't stop yet! The encouragements just keep coming.
 - There is so much of Christ here for us
- 5. The fifth vision is the vision of olive trees supplying a lampstand with oil.
 - It is the subject of chapter 4.
 - a. There is a lampstand with seven lamps fed by two olive trees...
 - So there was a constant supply of oil from the living trees to provide fuel to keep the lights burning...
 - The olive trees, we are told in verse 14, are **“the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth...”**
 - I would suggest that the governor (Zerubbabel) and the high priest, Joshua are the two anointed ones.
 - b. And the message is that the LORD will give His Spirit to His king and to His priest to do His work.
 - They surely felt their weakness at this time... but God supplies His Spirit so that we can serve Him in our weakness.
 - Zec 4:6-7... **So he answered and said to me: “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts. 7 ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” ’ ”**
 - All the work was done by His grace.
 - c. The encouragement for us is that God will give us His Spirit through our anointed King and Priest—who in Christ are the same person.
 - And it is in the strength of the Spirit that we can serve God even though we are small and weak because of our past sins... God is still with us...
 - If we return to Him, He will return to us and fill us with His Spirit.
 - Christ, our anointed king and our anointed priest gives the Spirit to us.
 - He is like an olive tree that never runs dry.
- 6. The sixth vision (in chapter 5 verses 1-4) is of a giant flying scroll (about the size of the front of some of our houses) with curses written on it.
 - The curse is given in verse 3: **Every thief and every perjurer will be expelled from the earth.**

- This is actually a blessing for those who love God because it is a curse on those who do not turn to God... to those who stay in rebellion against Him.
 - God will not allow rebellion against Him to continue forever.
- 7. The seventh vision is similar...see chapter 5, verses 5-11.
 - This time, Zechariah sees a woman called Wickedness stuffed in a basket and carried away to Shinar... another name for old Babylon...
 - The idea is that the Lord will purge wickedness from His people.
 - That is a glorious hope—that the LORD will expunge sin from us—that is what He has planned for us if we return to Him.
- 8. The final vision, the eighth one, is of war horses with chariots, going forth from the throne of God, to judge the enemies of His people.
 - Remember in the first vision that the Angel of the LORD interceded because the nations who had nearly destroyed the church were all at rest... and nothing happened to them.
 - Here that prayer of intercession is answered and these nations are brought to destruction.
 - Satan began the rebellion, but the LORD will bring him and all who remain united against the LORD among the nations to destruction.
 - Evil will not stand.

TRANS> What tremendous encouragement in these visions to those who are serving the LORD... Our labour is not in vain in the Lord, even though it seems so small.

- Building God's Temple, doing our part in the building of His kingdom, is always worthwhile.
 - God will always meet us with blessing when we return to Him.

C. But the climax of this encouragement to continue our work comes at the end of chapter 6—that the man called the BRANCH will come.

1. He has already been spoken of in the fourth vision (in chapter 3) where we saw that Joshua (or Jesus) the high priest and his companions were called a wondrous sign of the BRANCH.
 - And that He, this one the LORD calls 'My Servant the BRANCH,' will remove the iniquity of the land in one day (3:9)
2. Look at what the LORD says about the BRANCH in 6:12-13: **"Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: "Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; ¹³ yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." ' "**
 - This is our Jesus who is represented by Joshua the priest, and there are two great things said about Him here...
 - a. First that He will branch out.
 - Right now, they were building this temple and it was of little significance in the eyes of the nations.
 - But this temple is a precursor of the BRANCH, and when He comes, the nations will come to join in the building of the temple of God.

- Look at verse 15: **“Even those from afar shall come and build the temple of the LORD. Then you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. And *this* shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.”**
- That is what is happening today as we obey the voice of the LORD, He uses us to build His church...
 - Not by might not by power, but His Spirit from Christ.
- Jesus Christ, the BRANCH continues to branch out.
 - That is the first thing that is said about Him.
- b. The second thing noteworthy is that this man who is the BRANCH is a priest who **“shall sit and rule on His throne... so He shall be a priest on His throne.”**
 - This is extraordinary—a priest who is a king!
 - This is a picture of King Jesus the great high priest.
 - Joshua, the priest in Zechariah’s day, has a crown placed on his head, not to make him a king, but as a symbol that the one of whom he is *a wondrous sign* will be a priest who is a king.
 - Not only will He atone for our sins in one day, but He will also rule over all things for the sake of the church, and will rule over all who return to the LORD through Him in grace.
 - As our priest, He cleanses us from all our sins, and as our King, He subdues us and brings us to the Father.
- 3. This is what we get when we return to the LORD to build His temple...we get Jesus!
 - We return to Jesus our priest who is also a King... He is all that we need.
 - In Him is eternal life—full and free forgiveness along with the gift of the Spirit who makes us holy.
 - As priest, He atones for our sin in one day.
 - As king, He writes His law upon our hearts so that we cheerfully obey.
 - What Priest! What a King!
 - There is none like Him.
- D. So with these marvellous encouragements, the people go on building the temple and we go on in our work.
 1. Two years pass from the eight visions to chapter 7 & 8.
 - a. And they are still continuing the work of the temple.
 - You will note that chapter 7, verse 1, says “in the fourth year of King Darius,” so that is two years after the visions that we Zephaniah saw.
 - They were still going on with the work.
 - b. That is what we ought to do brothers and sisters...year after year...
 - With all these promises and encouragements, let us run the race with all diligence... let us go forth in the strength of the LORD of hosts.
 - Let us serve the LORD with gladness, for He is our priest and our king.
 - Let us pour out our lives from Him and build His church.
 2. But when we go on serving, questions will often arise as to how we ought to serve the LORD.

- a. Should we continue to fast as we did when we are in hard times now that we have been restored?
 - That is the question raised in 7:2-3: **when *the people* sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD, ³ and to ask the priests who *were* in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?”**
 - During the exile, they had been fasting regularly, praying for the restoration of Jerusalem and of the temple.
 - It was a good thing to do... but now their prayers have been answered and they have been brought back and they are building the temple,
 - so the question is, should they continue these fasts?
- b. The Lord responds by telling us that obedience is more important than fasting.
 - 1) There is a danger of fasting as a way to get God to bless us when we have not returned to Him.
 - You have seen it—no doubt, you have done it—you do religious things to get God to bless you without actually returning to Him.
 - Remember, that is how this book started—with the LORD promising that He would return to them if they would return to Him.
 - So the LORD asks them in 7:5: **“When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *months* during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me?”**
 - 2) And then He tells them that obedience would have been far better...
 - If they had served Him as their God to start with—then the exile would never have happened...
 - There would never have been a need for the fasting in exile... Jerusalem would never have been destroyed.
 - **v7: “*Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?*”**
 - The LORD goes on to press home the point in the rest of the chapter.
 - The reason He scattered them was not because they did not fast, but because they turned away from Him and would not listen to the prophets He sent to them.
3. And why is He saying this? Just to make them feel bad for departing from Him?
 - a. No... He is making it clear to them what He desires and has always desired to bless them.
 - In chapter 8:1-3 He explains that He is zealous to return to them... look at verse 2: **Thus says the LORD of hosts: “I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.”**
 - Isn’t that encouraging... He is a God who is eager to bless His people... zealous to do so. He had no pleasure in punishing them.
 - He describes how He will gladly bring His people to a state of great prosperity and happiness... that is His desire.

- He speaks of old men and old women watching children playing in the streets...
 - He speaks of saving them... 8:7-8: **Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; ⁸ I will bring them *back*, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.”**
 - He speaks of bumper crops in verses 10-13... of blessing them instead of cursing them.
 - And look at verse 14 & 15: **For thus says the LORD of hosts: “Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,” says the LORD of hosts, “And I would not relent, ¹⁵ so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.”**
- b. So what does He want from us as we go on in His work?
- Most of all, He wants godliness...
 - Verse 16-17: **“These *are* the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; ¹⁷ let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these *are things* that I hate,” says the LORD.**
 - Then many of the fasting days will become days of joyful feasting (8:18-19).
 - If you turn to Him, your fasting will be turned to days of joy...
 - Verse 19 says our fasts will all become cheerful feasts.
 - And instead of God’s people being under the oppression of the enemy, they will be receiving eager disciples from the nations...
 - This is what happens when we return to the LORD.
 - Listen to the concluding verses of chapter 8... 8:20-23: **“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; ²¹ the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.” ²² Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.’ ²³ Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you.*” ’ ”**

Conclusion: So you see...the LORD encourages us through the prophecies of Zechariah that if we but return to Him, He truly will return to us.

- He has already made provision for us and He is eager to bless us.
 - If you come to Him, you will not find Him reluctant to bless you. You will find Him delighted to do so.
 - He has given us a Saviour who is a priest and a king and He is able to save us to the uttermost—if we will but come to Him.
- As His people, we need not be under chastisement... if we will but come to build His house—
 - How He will bless us.

- How He will prosper our work.
- What joy we will have bringing in the harvest.
- Next week, we will plan to look at chapter 9-14 where Zechariah shows us an even fuller picture of Christ.
 - What He will do through Him regardless of what His people do.
 - But from this week... be encouraged to go on in your labour for the Lord and for His kingdom.