

Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
7 January 2018

ZECHARIAH – God Remembers

Zechariah 1:1-6 (KJV) ¹In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, ²The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. ³Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. ⁴Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and *from* your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. ⁵Your fathers, where *are* they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? ⁶But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Haggai 1:1-11 (KJV) ¹In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, ²Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. ³Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴*Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house *lie* waste? ⁵Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. ⁶Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes. ⁷Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. ⁸Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. ⁹Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. ¹⁰Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit. ¹¹And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare says, "Open Thy gate of mercy, gracious God! My soul flies through these wounds to seek out Thee."

The book of Zechariah opens to us the gate of God's mercy. It is God's step-by-step book of encouragement for the afflicted and repentant. The secret of God's blessings is in the Person of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Israel returned to their dilapidated homeland in Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. The gloom that surrounded the people of God threatened to cause them to give up their faith! There was great economic depression facing the returnees. There were powerful enemies around that sought to devour them. They were in a precarious situation. The returnees were on the brink of abandoning God to rebuild their physical lives at all cost. God sent His prophet Zechariah to arouse them out of their self-indulgence. While Haggai emphasized the rebuilding of the Temple, Zechariah focused on their spiritual transformation. The older folks wept when they saw the pathetic state of the rebuilt Temple. Yet

Zechariah had to awaken them to look beyond the externals to the spiritual, beyond the present to the future, that they may see the very presence of God in their midst, leading and guiding them.

We often see with our physical eyes and conclude that the situation for us is hopeless! But God has given to us spiritual eyes to see through His good and comforting words to uplift our hearts and to show to us our future hope and glory with Christ. The events today are zooming toward Christ's Second Coming. What should we do as Christians? How should we order our lives? May the study and meditation on this book of Zechariah challenge us to greater zeal for the work of God.

(1) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DATES

Zechariah 1:1 (KJV) ¹ *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,*

Zechariah is best known as the prophet called to minister comfort and hope in the post-exilic period. His message was a challenging voice that roused Israel to rebuild their spiritual lives as they rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was the centre and symbol of their faith. It was to put them once more on the path of devotion to their Lord. Zechariah was from a priestly family. His father was Berechiah and grandfather Iddo. His contemporaries were the elderly prophet Haggai, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 5:1-2; Zech 3:1; 4:6, 6:11). Haggai began his ministry two months earlier in the 6th month (Hag 1:1).

God spoke through Zechariah at a specific point in history: after 70 years of captivity and exile in Babylon. It was the 8th month called Heshvan (November) in the Jewish calendar, a rainy month when wheat and barley were sown. It was the second year of Darius Hystaspes' reign, emperor of Persia. The year was 520 B.C. Observe that the dating is based on the reign of a foreign king, so the returnees were under foreign domination. The older returnees had much to reflect on as they pondered upon God's dealings with their forefathers and in their own generation. Israel was forever cured of idolatry and profoundly penitent for past backslidings. It was a new beginning.

Are there certain times in your life when God specifically touched your heart through His written Word? God has specific work for each one of His children on earth. Are you actively walking according to His will? I pray the Lord will keep me walking daily with Him. "As Thou hast sought, so let me seek, Thy erring children lost and lone." Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

(2) THE MERCIES OF GOD

Zechariah 1:1-2 (KJV) ¹ *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,* ² *The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.*

Zechariah means "The Lord remembers" based on the same form of the imperative in Psalm 25:7 "...remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD."

Psalm 25:6-7 (KJV) ⁶ *Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.* ⁷ *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.*

It is an urgent plea that God forgets not His own people. How do we know that God will remember us? It is according to God's tender mercies and loving kindness.

The tender mercies of God describe the mercy of God that includes the element of compassion. The root verb is "love" (*raham*). It is the outworking of God's love for His people. It is derived from the noun "womb." The picture of God's love for His people is likened to the unborn baby nourished in the mother's womb. The umbilical cord supplies the oxygenated, nutrient- rich blood to nourish the unborn baby. The unborn baby is fully dependent on the life-line of the mother. This is how much we are dependent on our Creator, who is also our Sustainer and most importantly, our Saviour. We are lost and helpless, estranged from God, when we choose to walk our own way.

The loving kindness (*hesed*) of God speaks of His mercy, goodness, kindness and faithfulness. It expresses His loyalty and devotion to the solemn promises in His Word. The steadfast love of God will keep His covenant promises with Israel. He does not forsake neither does He forgets His children. The Lord spoke through Zechariah to the discouraged Jews in their devastated homeland to pick up courage to rebuild the Temple. (The rebuilding stopped 15 years earlier, in 535 B.C.) The people were like a bruised reed and smoking flax. The compassionate Lord will not allow them to be broken nor quenched.

Is your family experiencing sufferings and afflictions of illness, deaths and other distresses? The ancient prophet has a good message of God's unfailing love for you. We cannot see the hand of God but the knowledge of His loving heart stills us through every trial of life. Mercy imitates God and disappoints Satan. Lord, help me to be still and know that You are God.

The Lord is Israel's covenant God. He created the nation of Israel to be His national witness. Israel is the guardian of the Holy Oracles of God. These are His eternal, unchangeable and everlasting words. Israel's privileged position in the sight of God is written for posterity by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:7-9: *"For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons."*

But Israel when they entered the Promised Land, sinned by going after the Canaanite gods. As a result, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom of Judah forsook the Lord their God and judgment fell upon them (2 Chron. 33:1-10, 2 Kgs 21:1-16). Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. For seventy years, they were exiled in Babylon. God did not forget Israel despite their waywardness. It grieved the heart of God when His people knowingly sinned against Him. The years of exile were years of soul searching in a foreign land.

There was a man who was jobless for two years. He was so discouraged that he stopped going to church. Staying alone and single, he became so despondent that he unplugged his telephone line and decided to cut himself off from the world. The Lord in His mercy restored him into fellowship when he went back to church for worship, and partook of the Lord's Supper again. The hymns of Zion restored his ailing heart. The Lord also gave him a job in the midst of severe economic recession. The Lord remembers His own. *"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently."* *"Lest I forget Thy love for me, Lord, lead me to Calvary."*

(3) A CALL TO REPENTANCE

Zechariah 1:3 (KJV) ³ *Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.*

The background of the book of Zechariah is given in Ezra 1-6 and Haggai 1-2. The exiles first returned from captivity to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1-2). The altar was erected and the foundation of the new Temple

laid in 535 B.C. (Ezra 3). However, the work of the Temple was stopped from 535 B.C. to 520 B.C. due to opposition (Ezra 4). The work of the Temple resumed in 520 B.C. (Hag. 1, Zech. 1) and was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 5-6).

The returnees were exhorted by Haggai to rebuild the Temple that has stalled for the past 15 years. The admonitions were given in Hag. 1:4, 6-11: *“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?...Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.”* The returnees have laboured for physical prosperity in the past 16 years yet not prospering. The Lord has withheld His blessing because their desire for material prosperity was at the expense of fulfilling God’s will for their lives. Zechariah sounded the alarm to awaken them out of their slumber before judgment comes! The Great Commission is yet unfinished. Lord, help me not to build my home at the expense of Your Kingdom.

(4) NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

Zechariah 1:3-4 (KJV) ³ *Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.* ⁴ *Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.*

“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! ... Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? ... Thus saith the LORD... I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (Isa 45:9,12). The “LORD of hosts” (Zech 1:3) describes the God of action. He is the commander of all powers, both material and spiritual. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. It is the Lord of hosts that spoke thrice in verse 3 (53 times in this book) for His people to repent from their sins and backsliding. God has the power to create and the power to destroy. Surely, we His creatures must tremble at His wrath when we are not on the Lord’s side.

We recall that the Indian Ocean undersea earthquake of December 26, 2004, has an epicentre off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. From that epicentre is triggered a series of devastating tsunamis along the coasts of most landmasses bordering the Indian Ocean, killing more than 225,000 people in eleven countries, and inundating coastal communities with waves of up to 30 meters (100 feet). It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in history. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand were hardest hit. With a magnitude of between 9.1 and 9.3, it is the second largest earthquake ever recorded on a seismograph. It triggered other earthquakes as far away as Alaska. It is a wake-up call. The Bible speaks clearly that before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there will be earthquakes in diverse places. The warning sign intensifies and provides a constant reminder that His Second Coming is soon and He is returning as Judge. There is only one solution for men to escape the wrath of the Lord of hosts. It is in the ark of Jesus Christ. The Lord of hosts speaks to you today, *“Turn ye unto me...and I will turn unto you.”*

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

“Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.”

(5) SETTING OUR HEARTS ARIGHT

Zechariah 1:5 ⁵ *Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?*

Keeping our hearts aright is a moment-by-moment battle. Zechariah admonished the children of Israel not to follow the bad examples of their fathers who turned not from their evil ways. God sent His prophets time and again to warn Israel to flee from idolatry and immorality. They despised these admonitions. The world today is filled with idolatry and immorality, ready for God's judgment. Are our ears dull of hearing that we cannot hear? When we insist on going the way of sin, God will deal with us according to our sins.

Biblical history provides good lessons for us. We must rehearse the good heritage of godly virtues for our emulation. I came across an out-of-print book "Character Sketches for Boys and Girls" that teaches us cardinal Christian virtues. One of the biblical teachings is "Be right, then go ahead." This saying is full of practical wisdom. If you are wrong, better not go ahead; if you are right, do not waste a moment in going ahead. Consider before you act. Having considered and made sure that you are on the right track, action is now a solemn duty.

The Bible provides for us the answer to all our spiritual and also physical needs. "It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe. Its doctrines are binding, its precepts binding, its histories are true!" (Author unknown) Have you truly consulted the Bible today? Is your quiet time a rush or a relish?

Remind me of the wonderful work of salvation He has begun in my life, knowing that He also will perfect it. Help me, Lord, to set my heart aright, and my spirit steadfast with You.

(6) COME BACK TO THE LORD

Zechariah 1:6 (KJV) ⁶ *But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.*

Jesus is the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. All who come in faith is thoroughly cleansed. John the Baptizer was raised to make ready a people for the Lord in His first coming. We are God's herald to sound the message of repentance for the remission of sins before His Second Coming. Are we true to our Lord's commission?

The spirit of God rested upon John as upon Zechariah, to point the people back to God. The older generation who had beheld the glory of the first Temple wept when they saw the new Temple. It was so lacking in the external glory of the former. Nevertheless, it was not the externals that counted. What mattered was that they were fulfilling God's will for their lives. Are you?

Re-consecrate your lives to the Lord once again with these words penned by Rev Timothy Tow (sung to a Korean tune). Gracious words beckoning us to repent where we have fallen.

*Oh come unto the Lord,
Oh come back to the Lord,
Our Lord is waiting for Your return both night and day;
He is anxiously waiting for you With His doors kept open wide,
As if He is waiting in the night, For His lost child to come back home.*

No matter how hard hit, how beaten I may be, the Lord's hands will comfort me greatly, they will touch and will heal me. Lord, help me to forsake my sins and return to You.

(7) SEEKING SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

Zechariah prophesied from 520 to 518 B.C. spanning from Zechariah chapter 1 to chapter 8. Many years later, when apostasy set in again, he wrote chapter 9 to chapter 14. The Temple was completed in 516 B.C. after 4 years. One hundred or more years after that, the prophet Malachi brought God's final words of warning and promise before the inter-testament era of 400 years. Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi are also known as the restoration prophets. Do you know that the New Testament quotes and alludes to the Book of Zechariah 41 times! The Book of Zechariah is "the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic, and the most eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament" (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia). It is a difficult yet most rewarding to study.

The Lord had predicted that Israel would fall, yet she would not be totally eradicated. When we sin against God, He sees and He knows. We cannot escape the eyes of God. While the Lord tarries, may we take the opportunity to repent and return to Him.

Spurgeon made a good observation concerning our spiritual need when he wrote commenting on Psalm 42:1 "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks...*". "A camel does not pant after water brooks, because it carries its own water within. But the hart does, because it has no inward resources. After being hunted on a hot day, it has no inward supplies; it is drained of its moisture. So are we. We do not carry a store of grace within of our own on which we can rely. We need to come again and again and again to the divine fountain and drink of the eternal spring. Hence it is because we have a new life, and that life is dependent on God, and has all its fresh springs in Him, therefore we pant and thirst after Him." (Edited)

The people did hearken to the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah for they "*did fear before the LORD*" (Hag 1:12). They arose and built.

I need spiritual nourishment. Feed me, Lord, with Your Living Bread!