

“Zechariah, Tell Me About Zion” (Zechariah 8:1–23)(8.12.18)

Zechariah 8:1–23 (NIV84)

8 Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. 2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”

3 This is what the Lord says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

4 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. 5 The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

6 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the Lord Almighty.

7 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. 8 I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

9 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “You who now hear these words spoken by the prophets who were there when the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord Almighty, let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built. 10 Before that time there were no wages for man or beast. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man against his neighbor. 11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the Lord Almighty.

12 “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. 13 As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.”

14 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered me,” says the Lord Almighty, 15 “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. 16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the Lord.

18 Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. 19 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”

20 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, 21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’ 22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him.”

23 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’ ”

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: ‘Zechariah, Tell Me About Zion’

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Cowardly Lion traveled the Yellow Brick Road to reach the Emerald City. Similarly, many Christians are pursuing a destination without a true

understanding of themselves or where they are going. Dorothy sought out the Wizard of Oz so she could go home, when she already possessed the power to return. The Scarecrow sought a brain, the Tinman a heart, and the Cowardly Lion, courage; all the while they already possessed these things.

The Emerald City is fictional. Its ruler is the self-described Great and Powerful Oz. Who, in reality, is a big fraud. In contrast, Zion is real. And, The LORD Almighty is the God of the universe who desires intensely to dwell with His people in this heavenly Jerusalem.

How do we find our way to Zion? In Zechariah 9:9 (NIV84) we hear a pronouncement of The Coming of Zion's King

9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

This promise is often quoted on Palm Sunday describing when Jesus enters Jerusalem and the crowds joyously welcome him. And in the sixth verse of Psalm 2, the LORD proclaims, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

BODY:

2500 years ago, Zechariah is writing about the exiled people of God being brought home by the LORD Almighty. This was about the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, about the restoration of the holy Temple, about the restoration of community, about the restoration of identity. At the same time, it is an eschatological prophecy, which means the fulfillment of human history.

You and I are living in the in-between. And yet...we are called to live into the promises of Zion as far as we are capable. This is why our LED sign has a slide that says, "Kingdom Living Starts Here." What does that look like? Zechariah gives us some insight.

First, let me establish that each one of us can proclaim our place in Zion, that we are the inhabitants of many cities who say to one another, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' Yes, I myself am going because Zion is promised to me through my faith in Jesus.

In contrast to Mount Sinai, the mountain where the law was given to Moses, we will reside on the mountain of grace. We read in the book of Hebrews 12:22-24

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Every week, we recite the Lord's Prayer, which acknowledges the city of the Living God. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Zechariah tells us that God's kingdom is one of community and connection, celebrating the cycle of life.

"Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. 5 The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

Several places in this 8th chapter, Zechariah mentions the multitude of people. Picture all the senior citizens on porches, on park benches, sharing stories and enjoying each other's company. All around them is a bustle of children, children everywhere, at play. This is the cycle of life. Children playing, growing up, and the sharing of lives.

This has been on my mind a lot over these last few months. This week it really hit home for me; especially Thursday afternoon until Friday afternoon. For me, it was 24 hours of living in Zion. Thursday afternoon, Carol and I went with my son, his wife, and their four children to the Salem County Fair. The blessing of family time, of talking, teasing, eating together, and laughing together filled us with joy. Probably most fun was watching my daughter-in-law and granddaughter participate in the skillet tossing competition!

My granddaughter, Rachel, gave Carol a Thank You note that night:

Nana & Grandpa:

Thank you for making my 16 years thus far (she turned 16 on August 1st) extra special! & thanks for the bike & the shoes and also coming and helping with my party ☺ Then in parentheses, & everything else you do for me in normal life. ☺ love, Rachel (heart) and underneath was the scripture verse Matthew 5:16 (NIV84) Jesus said, 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

The next morning, Carol and I went to the funeral of a friend at Absecon UMC. Carol sat up in the chancel area because she was doing some of the scripture reading. Other than a photographer, I sat alone up in the balcony. Observing everything from that vantage point gave me an interesting perspective. At the opposite side of the church from the balcony is a large wooden cross with God is Love in gold letters over it. The beautiful pipes from the pipe organ reached towards heaven with equally beautiful music emanating like incense filled the sanctuary. The church was filled with people.

We prayed together. We recited Psalm 23 together. We sang "It is Well with My Soul," "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," and, "Hymn of Promise." Family and friends shared memories. After the committal in the church cemetery, everyone gathered for a time of sharing food and conversation. It truly was a celebration of life.

Zechariah was writing for a people who suffered from a forced exile. Today, many in our culture suffer from a self-imposed exile. Sometimes the exile is the pursuing of opportunity. Sometimes the exile is the repercussions of pursuing sin. On the other hand, sometimes the exile is the culmination of circumstances and culture from which we are seemingly incapable of escaping. Our children go off the college or join the military. The allure of the world and the pursuit of fame and fortune, or "just something better," draw them further away. We have become a highly mobile culture, with its benefits and its drawbacks. Family and friends are spread over the whole country.

Back at home, the family front has become fractured and disjointed. With the high rate of divorce and the increased prominence of the single parent home, creating a nurturing environment for a family is challenging. Even in two-parent homes, to maintain a certain standard of living, or for some, any standard of living, requires both parents to work. Day Care workers and public schools assume parenting roles earlier and earlier in our children's lives. It seems that our schedules are maxed out as we try to juggle all of our commitments. On top of work and maintaining the home, there are all kinds of activities: sports, art programs, music lessons, civic organizations. Again, there are benefits and there are drawbacks. When it is always go, go, go, when do we recharge? When do we spend time with our Lord?

The local church is not localized in a particular neighborhood; no longer does it serve as a centralized focal point of that neighborhood community. We have lost an anchor for our souls. Between entertainment options at every turn and the proliferation of technology, it seems we never take the time to truly be with other people, to be in community with other people. Our attention is always diverted.

Recently, I was in a hospital waiting room where family and friends had gathered because of a loved one in Intensive Care. At one point, I noticed that every individual was on their smart phones. It seems we are losing the ability to relate to others. Even during an emotional and significant life happening, isolation, self-imposed exile, was winning out.

Jesus said in John 10:10 (NIV84) The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

That is how Zechariah is describing Zion. The people of Israel had identified times of fasting in order to mourn their individual and national sins and punishment. The LORD Almighty is going to bless Zion and will turn the fasting into festivals. They are going to be like the carnival we had last week in Galloway or the county fairs. It is going to be a place of glad occasions, celebrations.

Zion is going to be a place of joy. Normally, I pick all the hymns to align them with the sermon. I did not pick today's Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You; but, it was the perfect preface for this message. Zion is a place of celebration and joy.

Not only is Zion a place of play, it is a place of prayer. Our NIV says, let us go at once to entreat the Lord. Other translations say entreat the favor of the Lord. The King James translation says, "Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD." When is the last time you heard that kind of exuberance for a prayer meeting? Our church should be a house of prayer. I myself am going, I declare!

Zechariah tells us that in Zion the truth is spoken. Of course this means we are to deal honestly with each other. At the same time I hear Jesus' words in John 14:6 (NIV84), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And I say to you, that Jesus should be on your lips. We are to encourage others to seek the Lord; to speak the truth.

Let us proclaim with Isaiah: Isaiah 52:7 (NIV84)

7 How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"

The other day, another pastor and I got into a somewhat passionate disagreement about racism and segregation in New Jersey schools. We agreed that it is undesirable but disagreed on how to resolve it. In Zion, the courts, the government will wield just decisions. There will not be oppression. Neighbor will not harm neighbor. People will not swear falsely. The LORD Almighty hates this behavior.

Psalm 48

1 Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

2 It is beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth.

Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,
the city of the Great King.

8 As we have heard,
so have we seen
in the city of the Lord Almighty,
in the city of our God:

God makes her secure forever.

9 Within your temple, O God,
we meditate on your unfailing love.

10 Like your name, O God,
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

11 Mount Zion rejoices,
the villages of Judah are glad
because of your judgments.

CONCLUSION:

Zechariah tells us, the residents of Zion are given strength for a reason. We are to build the Temple. Jesus, knowing that the Jerusalem Temple was going to be destroyed; and, knowing that he, our Savior, was going to be crucified, made a bold declaration in John 2:19 (NIV84), "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Yes, Jesus laid down his life for us and on the third day he was resurrected. The Jerusalem Temple is no longer the focus of worship or the place of God's presence. Jesus is the focus of our worship and the exact image of the invisible God.

Yes, we are given strength to build up our personal temple of God, our own bodies. Yes, we are given strength to build up the Body of Christ of which Jesus is the Head. This is the Church. This is our Zion, the kingdom of God, until Christ comes in final victory.

Not only are we given strength to build the Temple, Zechariah tells us we are given strength to be a blessing to others. This is loving our neighbor as ourselves. This is blessing our community. This is sharing the love of God.

We have all been specifically equipped with spiritual gifts to edify the Body of Christ. We are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul. Like our fellow pilgrims, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Cowardly Lion, we possess all we need to reach our Emerald City, the Holy Mountain of God, the city on the hill, Zion.

Let us join together with all the saints; let us join together with the thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion; we're marching upward to Zion the beautiful city of God.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.